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## The British Government, the Public, and Nuclear Deterrence

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**The British Government, the Public, and Nuclear Deterrence**

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Doctor of Philosophy in Defence Studies  
at King's College London

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## **Abstract**

This thesis offers a novel insight into the relationship between British government engagement with the public on nuclear deterrence policy, and the factors which influence that policy development. It considers the evolution of a complex, and largely unacknowledged aversion to the implications of total war, in particular the notion of inflicting non-combatant casualties as a deliberate, if not intentional, aspect of national strategy. This aversion was evident in the reluctance to engage in reprisals for bombing raids on London during the First World War, and the tensions it caused between operational strategy and public policy during the bombing campaign of the Second World War.

The same aversion influenced early British understanding of nuclear deterrence, and public government engagement on nuclear deterrence policy tends to have been limited to technical detail such as performance or cost ever since. This is symptomatic of a reluctance to engage in complex moral debates in public, and modern media have exacerbated the problems by a tendency to reduce such issues to polarised arguments inhibiting genuine discussion while producing eye-catching studio drama.

The public messaging implications of the challenging relationship between contemporary 'rights-based' ethical concepts and the more consequentialist 'just war' ethics that tend to dominate government policy have not been satisfactorily examined before. This thesis considers that relationship and its impact. It concludes that only government must face all aspects of moral choices: while anti-nuclear opposition can afford selective deontological absolutes, governments must have recourse to consequentialist moral concepts to provide for national defence, and this is difficult to portray in public, particularly through modern media.

Government must engage in more than technical arguments if the strategic requirement for retention of the nuclear deterrent is to be perceived as legitimate and not rendered vulnerable to public misapprehension driven by vocal minorities.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the late Professor Andrew Skinner FBA FRSE who showed me the importance of a full and rounded education.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

*'It is two and a half minutes to midnight: ... In addition to the existential threats posed by nuclear weapons and climate change, new global realities emerged, as trusted sources of information came under attack, fake news was on the rise, and words were used in cavalier and often reckless ways.'*<sup>1</sup>

The Doomsday Clock statement is compelling, not only because it is closer to midnight today than it has been since 1954, but because the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists articulates the importance of 'trusted sources of information' and the impact of 'fake news' and cavalier use of words. In early 2017, populist scientist Professor Brian Cox argued that;

*'What you rely on in an open democracy is the ability of people to take an informed position ... Facts are easy to obtain, but knowing what they mean is more elusive than ever. Perhaps this is why facts can be taken and twisted to serve multiple purposes.'*<sup>2</sup>

The political campaigns prior to the 2016 'Brexit' referendum highlighted the need for the 'ability of people to take an informed position' on such decisions, but the same campaigns also exposed significant failings in existing mechanisms to ensure the validity of polemic assertions, contributing to the demise of trusted sources of information and the rise of fake news. This difficulty is manifest for almost any complex policy decision, and the decision to leave the European Union was definitely complex. Such difficulties will be exacerbated if a decision is not only complicated technically, but imbued with moral implications where there are myriad competing options, all of which involve hazard of one kind or another. The Doomsday Clock is a very clear metaphor presenting just such a complex issue in a way which seems simple, but which is, in fact, anything but.

This thesis will consider UK government engagement with the public on one such technically and morally convoluted area; the evolution of nuclear deterrence policy. Starting from an assumption that there has been very little government engagement with the public on nuclear deterrence policy, the thesis examines the factors that have influenced historic policy decisions, and identifies perpetually recurring themes; geo-strategic demands, military imperatives, technical aspects such as

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<sup>1</sup> BRONSON, R. 2017. *It is two and a half minutes to midnight; 2017 Doomsday Clock Statement* [Online]. Chicago: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Available: <http://thebulletin.org/sites/default/files/Final%202017%20Clock%20Statement.pdf> [Accessed 27 January 2017].

<sup>2</sup> COX, B. & FORSHAW, J. 2016. Education is as important to Security as Aircraft Carriers or Missile Defence. *The Big Issue*. 21 Nov 2016 ed. London: William Gibbons.



system performance and cost, and ethical reservations.

Government intervention in contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> Century discussion (such as it is) of the replacement of the submarine element of the strategic nuclear deterrent tends to have been focused on the technical aspects of policy decisions; capability, invulnerability and cost. The strategic necessity is taken as assumed, despite fundamental changes to the international security environment since Trident was procured. The ethical implications of nuclear deterrence are, simply, a closed box.

The British public is therefore inhibited in its ability to take an informed position in terms of Professor Cox's point above because such public debate as there is, is substantially instigated, informed and interpreted by those opposed to the British retention of nuclear weapons. As one commentator put it in the context of the Hutton Enquiry in 2005; '... smug assumptions about the general public's willing acceptance of government statements on such issues as the strategic deterrent may not be entirely wise.'<sup>3</sup>

In 1980, Mrs Thatcher's government decided to replace Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent, the Polaris missile system, with the Trident missile system and to build four Vanguard class submarines to carry it. Having pointed out that the Commons had not debated nuclear deterrence since 1965, the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr Pym, told the Commons; '...the arguments surrounding nuclear strategy neither should be, nor can be, taken for granted. They require constant rethinking and restating...'<sup>4</sup> However, in 2007, the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr Browne spoke on 'The United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent in the 21st Century', opening his speech by saying; 'I am pleased to be giving this speech here at King's – the venue of the last major speech on this subject by any of my predecessors in this job, Malcolm Rifkind back in 1993.'<sup>5</sup>

Between 1993 and 2007 the World had been coming to terms with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Russian Federation; NATO and the Russian Federation had become partners in the Partnership for Peace programme;<sup>6</sup> Trident had replaced Polaris; the UK's only other nuclear weapon, the free-fall WE177 bomb had been withdrawn; the 1998 Strategic Defence Review had been

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<sup>3</sup> HAINES, S. 2005. Replacing Trident; A New Nuclear Debate? *Naval Review*, 93, 113-117. p116

<sup>4</sup> HC Debate 24 January 1980. HANSARD vol 977 cc672-784. Col 672

<sup>5</sup> BROWNE, D. 2007. The United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent in the 21st Century. In: MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (ed.). London: TSO.

<sup>6</sup> Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and the partnership for Peace in 1994: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50090.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50090.htm) (accessed 24 Jun 17)

published; the 9/11 attack on the World Trade centre had happened and; the UK had been engaged in the subsequent Global War on Terror. The *raison d'être* for nuclear deterrence when both Polaris and Trident were purchased was the Cold War. In the 2006 White Paper 'The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent'<sup>7</sup> the retention of the nuclear deterrent had been justified against an ill-defined potentially emerging threat; and each Secretary of State for Defence had been publicly silent on the issue of nuclear deterrence for 14 years. The next major speech on nuclear deterrence to be made by a Secretary of State for Defence was in 2016.<sup>8</sup>

### Research Question

On one level, the research question can be described as; 'what factors have affected British government engagement with the public on nuclear deterrence policy?' It is, however, the central argument of this thesis that government involvement in public discourse about nuclear deterrence policy has been inhibited. The thesis will therefore consider the salient factors considered by British governments when formulating nuclear deterrence policy and identify what causes this apparent inhibition. In short, the thesis will consider; 'why have successive British governments struggled to sustain a public discourse on nuclear weapons policy and strategy?'

The author's underlying hypothesis is that there is a connection between the Second World War debate about the legitimacy of the strategic bombing campaign and subsequent government reluctance to engage in public discussion about nuclear deterrence policy. The common element here appears to be a political aversion to being seen to be basing strategy on a willingness to inflict significant non-combatant casualties. The core of the issue is not necessarily the willingness to inflict non-combatant casualties *per se*, but the aversion to public admission of that as a policy objective. As is demonstrated in Chapter 4 below, this is evident in the highly nuanced correspondence on the purpose and conduct of the strategic bombing campaign between Whitehall and Bomber Command between 1943 and 1945. Early research for this thesis suggested that this moral ambivalence could be

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<sup>7</sup> UK GOVT 2006. The future of the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent: the White Paper CM6994. London: HMSO.

<sup>8</sup> FALLON, M. 2016. *The case for the retention of the UK's independent nuclear deterrent; Speech at the Policy Exchange 23 March 2016* [Online]. London: HMSO. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-case-for-the-retention-of-the-uks-independent-nuclear-deterrent> [Accessed 22 November 2016].

traced back to the reprisals debates after the German bombing raids on London during the First World War.

This thesis will show that this ambivalence has been a perpetual undercurrent of British nuclear ownership, and Britain could fairly be characterised as having been a reluctant nuclear power. It will also show however, that over the same period the persistent government view has been that nuclear weapons constituted a key component of British foreign, security and defence policy. Retention of nuclear weapons remains a fundamental aspect of 21st Century policy. This tension at the heart of British foreign and security policy is the key to public reticence about nuclear deterrence policy, and this thesis will demonstrate continuity in that tension from 1915, through the development of the Royal Air Force in the inter-war years, the strategic bombing campaign of the Second World War and the development and maintenance of an independent nuclear deterrent through the Cold War and subsequently.

Commitment to another generation of Trident will offer the UK Nuclear Weapon State status until the 2060s and a dispassionate and objective examination of the processes underpinning that decision should be a logical and necessary prerequisite in a 21st Century liberal democracy. This thesis demonstrates that there is an important lacuna in contemporary understanding in this area, in the public, in government, and in academia, and it seeks to contribute to a more informed, balanced and open public discourse on this critical aspect of national security. There are challenges involved in any objective review of current government strategy or policy, but without such a discussion, policy may stagnate or develop tangentially, and this is not tenable for something as fundamental to foreign, security and defence policy as nuclear strategy.

### **Thematic framework and structure**

By the retrospective nature of the question, the research tends to focus on historical analysis of decision making and public engagement. Throughout the history of the UK nuclear deterrent, there appears to have been limited government engagement with the public. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, up to the general election of 2015, the deeply philosophical public debates characterised by the Reith lectures of 1957 and 1982 have not been repeated; public discourse on nuclear deterrence policy appears comatose; and what there is receives little government participation or interest.

The relationship between politicians and senior officials and the media has always been symbiotic– the media are the oxygen of the politicians, and without the politicians, there is no story. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook complained that '[the public] are served up interviews on political issues that often appear designed more to produce studio drama than to inform their audience.'<sup>9</sup> He makes a fair point, but from the opposite side, the Ministry of Defence Senior Officers' Interview technique course is all about not answering the questions posed, but using them as hooks to get across the points that you want to impart, regardless of the interviewer's intent.<sup>10</sup> This contributes to antagonistic media interviews and is even more pronounced in analysis programmes such as 'Question Time' or 'Any Questions' where contentious issues are posed to politicians, officials and individuals of completely opposed opinions. This tends to reduce media discussion of complex policy issues to punchy soundbites, instead of a careful analysis of conflicting options and mutually exclusive priorities, influenced by myriad highly nuanced factors. This section has sketched the context of the research question and suggested why it is pertinent today, and the remainder of the introduction will outline the methodology and conduct of the research and the structure of the remainder of the thesis.

The introduction will conclude with a short case study considering the decision not to broadcast 'The War Game', a 1965 BBC docu-drama on the aftermath of a nuclear attack on a Kent town. The political, media and public reactions to its withdrawal illustrate many of the key elements of the research questions being considered here. Its core message was that Civil Defence contingencies were completely inadequate. It was withdrawn prior to transmission after the BBC consulted with the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence. The director resigned from the BBC in protest, and questions were raised in Parliament and in the media. Ironically, the fate of the programme, rather than the issues it depicted, became the story, although in private cinema showings after 1966 it became a motif for the anti-nuclear movement, and was finally shown on British television in 1985. The lack of credibility of Civil Defence as a plausible element of national strategy in the nuclear age was well known to governments by the mid-1950s, but public acknowledgement of that was increasingly challenging and in 1968 it was shelved. The Home Office resurrection of the 1964 'Protect and Survive' pamphlet in 1980

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<sup>9</sup> COOK, R. 2003. *The Point of Departure*, London, Simon and Schuster. P57

<sup>10</sup> Author's personal experience 2003

against the backdrop of the deployment of ground launched cruise missiles in the UK was a public relations blunder on an epic scale, and is considered below.

The existing literature will be considered not in terms of the whole canon dealing with UK nuclear deterrence policy; that would constitute a thesis in itself, but only that pertinent to the themes and concepts being explored here. Analysis of such a vast area is by necessity highly selective, and the treatment of the surrounding context therefore may appear superficial and may neglect important aspects other than to mention them in passing. The background information should, however, provide sufficient information for those not familiar with the history to contextualise the main themes of this study. If required, a more comprehensive political history than Stoddart's three volume history covering 1964 to 1983<sup>11</sup> would be difficult to imagine, and secondary sources are cited as appropriate.

The bulk of the evidence and analysis will be historical; however, the purpose of chapters 4 to 6 is not to provide a political history of the development of the British nuclear deterrent, but to identify and consider particular elements suggesting continuity in public engagement within that development. As with the literature review, analysis is selective and focused on the central research questions; what factors affected decision making, and which factors influenced government engagement in the public discourse?

Chapter 4 considers the evolution of the mindset associated with the direction of the strategic bombing campaign of the Second World War but, drawing on Baldwin's famous 1932 dictum 'the bomber will always get through', it considers the evolution of a level of political recognition that; '...there is no power on earth that can protect [the man in the street] from being bombed...' <sup>12</sup> and it traces this back to the experiences of the First World War Zeppelin and Gotha bombing raids on London. In responding to these raids, the British government expressed distinct aversion to reprisals against German towns and cities. Debate about the merits of strategic bombing and 'traditional' means of warfare dominated strategic thinking during the interwar years. The experiences of the 'total war' Second World War gave the strategic impetus and led to the technical ability to inflict the massive damage

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<sup>11</sup> STODDART, K. 2012. *Losing an Empire and Finding a Role: Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons, 1964-70* London, Palgrave Macmillan. STODDART, K. 2014b. *The Sword and the Shield: Britain, America, NATO and Nuclear Weapons, 1970-1976*, London, Palgrave MacMillan. STODDART, K. 2014a. *Facing Down the Soviet Union; Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons 1976-1983*, Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>12</sup> HC Debate 10 November 1932. HANSARD vol 270 cc632.

envisaged by Douhet<sup>13</sup> and dramatised by HG Wells<sup>14</sup> and films such as 'Things To Come', and graphically foreshadowed at Guernica in 1937.

There was protracted and serious discussion within the British War Cabinet and RAF high command about the strategic bombing campaign and its legitimacy, a discussion which continues to this day. The unique contribution this thesis makes is to consider the impact of concerns about public opinion on that discussion and resulting strategy; it concludes that there was a concerted effort to maximise damage to areas of German cities, including industrial and residential areas, but that the public presentation of this policy was adapted to appear to show a precision bombing aspiration against industrial facilities only, which also caused unfortunate but unavoidable casualties amongst non-combatants. This ambivalent position; a distinct aversion to public acknowledgement of the willingness to inflict non-combatant casualties was inherited by those responsible for the early development of British nuclear strategy.

Chapter 5 analyses briefly the evolution of an independent British nuclear deterrent. It identifies the closely symbiotic relationship between strategy and technology, and the imperatives that each placed upon the other; critical factors for a state developing a nuclear capability on a shoestring budget. After the initial flurry of interest in the atomic bomb attacks on Japan in 1945, public attention moved on. Attlee's near-obsessive secrecy impacted on both development and more general understanding, and left a persistent legacy in the way that the nuclear deterrent policy was handled within government, Parliament and the public domain. Both Attlee and Churchill were very concerned about the moral implications of such weapons, but were equally completely convinced that they were necessary for Great Britain to retain her position and influence in the post-War World; neither chose to share this logic widely within Cabinet, let alone the public. Successive governments constrained nuclear policy within very small circles, convening restricted-membership Cabinet committees to oversee major policy decisions, and completely ignoring the nascent anti-nuclear opposition groups.

The Cuban Missile Crisis may be a major event in hindsight, but the contemporary records suggest that the British Cabinet was not substantially engaged, and nor was

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<sup>13</sup> DOUHET, G. 1998. *The Command of the Air*, Washington, Air Force History and Museum Programme.

<sup>14</sup> WELLS, H. G. 1908. *The War in the Air, and Particularly how Mr. Bert Smallways Fared While it Lasted*, London, George Bell and Sons.

Parliament. Macmillan appears to have exploited, but not actually cultivated, a public perception that the American cancellation of Skybolt in 1962 left the UK without a long term deterrent capability, and that the USA was therefore somehow responsible for provision of a substitute; Polaris. The Royal Navy had actually been working on the strategic case for a submarine-based strategic nuclear deterrent since at least 1958, and had a fully developed business case in hand the moment the Skybolt decision was known.

Having had a 1960 Conference vote in favour of adoption of a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament reversed in 1961, Wilson's Labour government was elected in 1964 on a manifesto commitment of renegotiation of the Polaris Sales Agreement. Within months, Wilson's Cabinet agreed on the construction of four Resolution class submarines and the purchase of Polaris missiles as agreed by Macmillan and Kennedy, although the force was presented publicly as part of an Anglo-American 'Atlantic Nuclear Force', a concept that was dropped almost immediately afterwards. The first of the class was to be HMS Revenge, and the submarines would thenceforth have been the 'Revenge Class' but this was thought (by the First Lord of the Admiralty) to be too malevolent and the first of class was commissioned HMS Resolution and the 4<sup>th</sup> 'Resolution Class' submarine was commissioned HMS Revenge.<sup>15</sup>

The period 1964-1979 is particularly interesting for the student of nuclear policy because it includes two Labour governments which abrogated manifesto commitments to reduce or cancel nuclear deterrence commitments; Wilson's government had commissioned Polaris and introduced it into Service, and in the 1970's, under extreme secrecy, introduced and sustained an update programme for Polaris; Super Antelope (later Chevaline). Callaghan's government, faced with the impending obsolescence of Polaris in the early 1980s, chose to continue the Chevaline programme and to commission studies into a Polaris replacement, despite having 'renounced any intention of moving towards the production of a new generation of nuclear weapons or a successor to the Polaris nuclear force.'<sup>16</sup> Both governments used very carefully worded public and parliamentary statements to convey one meaning which could be interpreted within their manifesto

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<sup>15</sup> HENNESSY, P. & JINKS, J. 2015. *The Silent Deep: The Royal Navy Submarine Service since 1945*. UK: Penguin Random House. P237

<sup>16</sup> LABOUR PARTY. 1979. *The Labour Way is the Better Way* [Online]. London: Labour Party. Available: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab79.htm> [Accessed 23 Sept 2015].

commitments, while also conveying almost exactly the opposite. Little wonder they avoided detailed public exploration of policy.

The Thatcher government inherited a febrile security situation in Europe in 1979; the Soviet deployment of SS20 medium range ballistic missiles upset NATO warfighting plans and threatened to decouple the Alliance nuclear deterrence posture from the American strategic deterrent. Combined with this was speculation that an announcement of the successor to Polaris was imminent. Mrs Thatcher, in keeping with precedent, set up a small Cabinet committee (MISC 7) to consider options, greatly informed by preparatory work commissioned by Callaghan which exceptionally had been provided to the new government.

Chapter 6 examines a torrid three-year period which saw the resurgence of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament as part of a pan-European protest against NATO nuclear weapons, the announcement of the NATO dual track response to the SS20 deployment and the near simultaneous decision and announcement to replace the Polaris nuclear deterrent with the similar, but more capable, Trident submarine launched missile system. Many of the technical factors which pertained for the Polaris decision in the early 1960s remained relevant, including the need to use an American system because the research and development costs for a bespoke British system would be prohibitive.

Elements of Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet held the opinion that more open engagement with the public would be beneficial, and both Pym (Defence Secretary) and his successor Nott advocated more engagement. They were not supported by the rest of MISC 7. Despite the 1980 publication of a ground-breaking Open Government Document<sup>17</sup> which described many of the factors on which the decision to replace Polaris with Trident had been taken, two years later Nott still felt that the case was not being made strongly enough; '... we may find that public opinion runs away from us. If this happens we will lose our strategic deterrent - and much besides.'<sup>18</sup>

Mrs Thatcher's government persisted in treating the decisions about NATO nuclear posture and the national nuclear deterrent as entirely separate, missing the point that they were indivisible in public perception. The anti-nuclear opposition mounted very coherent campaigns at local and national levels, and the government did not

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<sup>17</sup> UK GOVT 1980. The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force. London: HMSO.

<sup>18</sup> MOD Letter Nott (MOD) to Thatcher (PM) MO18 'Nuclear Issues' dated 20 Oct 82. TNA PREM 19/979. Paragraph 6



attempt to engage with this until it had been running for three years – by which time the parameters of the debate had been set by CND and others. The Roman Catholic Church had become involved as a result of the European-wide mass protests, and the British Churches therefore expressed their views.

Throughout, Ministers' understanding of the discourse was woefully underdeveloped, with the Prime Minister's Press Office singularly failing to grasp the importance, or the complexity, of the issue until a small Conservative Party committee began work on the 1983 election manifesto in late 1982. This committee engaged immediately with the Cabinet Office and the MOD and, under Nott's replacement Heseltine, the public campaign took an aggressive stance, aiming to undermine the credibility of anti-nuclear lobbies by suggesting that the leadership was being at least significantly influenced by Soviet pressure.

The early 1980s saw a rapid development of government understanding of the importance of engagement in the public debate. Pym and Nott understood that early engagement was necessary in order to set the parameters of the debate, but they were not supported by their Cabinet colleagues. Despite some false starts, the Conservative government recovered and actively engaged on deterrence during the 1983 general Election campaign against a Labour Party which stood on a unilateral disarmament platform. Mrs Thatcher's overwhelming victory at that election was a clear mandate to deploy ground-launched cruise missiles as part of the NATO response, and to procure Trident as the successor national nuclear deterrent. The anti-nuclear movement never really recovered.

The historical analysis suggests that there are a number of perennial factors which effect government decisions, and to a greater or lesser degree, the extent of public engagement. There is an elusive and insubstantial thread suggesting that engagement is linked to political concerns about potential perceptions of the morality of strategies which involve threat to non-combatants. Chapter 7 therefore considers specifically the ethics of the use of force, and the ethical challenges posed by emerging technologies as factors in political decision making.

Most moral consideration prior to the Second World War was generally conducted in the framework of the Just War Tradition. A key aspect of this Tradition is that it evolves constantly with experience and technology; only analysis of the Second World War enabled ethicists such as Walzer and Childress to articulate (and explain) key concepts such as 'double effect' and 'dirty hands' in terms which are

commonly understood today. It is clear from the evidence in chapter 4 that the protagonists, especially in the Bomber Command hierarchy, were wrestling with these almost visceral ethical issues, and evolving responses as best they could, with little prior preparation and no training.

It can be argued that statesmen inhabit a world dominated by ethical consequentialism within a realist framework where states act in terms of national interest. Invariably, if considering the use of force, the options statesmen have to choose all have negative moral outcomes; but they must decide which negative outcome. However, the thinking of most contemporary philosophers writing about the ethics of war is not based on consequentialist, or utilitarian, bases, but on a more individual rights-based concept, where individuals have unassailable rights, and it aspires to a normative concept of international relations. How does a Realist statesman articulate consequentialist thinking in the contemporary anarchy, against a deontological position based on an aspirational view of the World? In essence, little has changed in the hundred years since Mr Molteno MP demanded in Parliament; ‘...would [it] be in accordance with the high principles of humanity ... to attack the civil population?’<sup>19</sup> What has changed is the nature of the media which is far less deferential than it was in Molteno’s time and successive political figures have lamented the inability to consider complex ethical matters in public because of the binary nature of modern media presentation.

In order to provide a comparative context, two short case studies into the different ways governments have handled other complex technological and ethically challenging areas have been conducted; the 1982 Warnock inquiry into human embryology and fertilization, and the 2003 public consultation exercise on the genetic modification of crops. Both of these case studies offer alternative models for the handling of ethically complex technologies. Analysis of the Warnock Inquiry exposes a wealth of detail on her advice to government on the relationship between public perceptions and scientific advances, and ‘experts’. Particularly, she highlights the pluralism of society and the related wide diversity of views, concluding that; ‘there is a danger that ‘public opinion’ may come to be identified not with the views of the relatively ... open-minded majority, but with the views of the committed

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<sup>19</sup> HC Debate 24 April 1917. HANSARD vol 92 cc2224-5. Col 2225

and the fanatical.<sup>20</sup> The inquiry 'model' did not provide a definitive answer to Ministers, but it did provide demonstrably independent 'expert' advice.

Such expert advice is not necessarily palatable in intensely moral questions where individuals may want to follow their own views, but it certainly provides a credible source of independent information on which to form those views. This of course, addresses Professor Cox's point. Much less credible is the public consultation to which the Food Standards Agency resorted in its Consumer Views of Genetically Modified Food in 2003. This merely harnessed exactly the vociferous dogmatism which Warnock had sought to avoid.

The case studies also expose the importance of the public perception of risk as a factor in complex issues. Whilst experts routinely consider the relationship between likelihood and consequence, such balanced views are not conducive to simple media presentation, and 'risk' and 'expert advice' can therefore lead to distorted scrutiny of complex issues, especially complex ethical issues. Again, this suggests that independent, authoritative input to the public debate is critical.

The first part of the conclusion examines the changing nature of the engagement between government and public over deterrence issues between the deployment of Trident in 1995<sup>21</sup> and the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review against the historical development of the themes which affect that engagement. Each of these themes is closely inter-related, and the research question; 'what factors have affected British government engagement with the public on deterrence policy' suggests that there is a number of technical factors which influence system choices and decisions, and which form the bulk of the public discourse. Engagement on the ethical elements; the issue of why Britain needs a nuclear deterrent and the moral implications of nuclear deterrence and nuclear war (the two are not synonymous) has been avoided by successive governments. The ethical elements are always considered, in fact they are agonised over, privately and *in camera*, but not in public and not on the record.

The conclusion addresses why successive British governments have struggled to sustain a public discourse on nuclear weapons policy and strategy and concludes

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<sup>20</sup> WARNOCK, M. 1985. Moral Thinking and Government Policy: The Warnock Committee on Human Embryology. *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly; Health and Society*, 63, 19. P513

<sup>21</sup> HMS Vanguard conducted the first UK Trident patrol in 1995: <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation/the-fighting-arms/submarine-service/ballistic-submarines/hms-vanguard> (accessed 24 Jun 17)

that it appears to come down to an aversion to engage in debate about the conditional willingness to threaten non-combatants. This is the crux of how nuclear deterrence really works, despite anodyne technical language such as counter-value or counter-force. No-one could possibly consider nuclear war a moral good, but the debate should be about nuclear deterrence. The debate should be about how best to avoid war, not in a hypothetical World of normative ethical constructions, but in our present realist anarchy. There is a moral good in peace, and there is a compelling case to be made that there is a perfect correlation between the advent of nuclear deterrence and the absence of major conflict between great powers. That this peace may have been bought at the cost of conditional intent, and the associated moral tarnish of the very small numbers of those involved in nuclear deterrence (of whom the author is one) is a risk analysis that can and should be aired in public. At present, in much of the public view, nuclear deterrence is equated to nuclear war, and such debate as there is, is often predicated on this misunderstanding.

This inability to articulate the strategic case for the retention of the nuclear deterrent undermines its coherence and increases the risk that decisions on the future of the British strategic nuclear deterrent may be taken without full understanding of the strategic imperatives, based on technical discussions on cost and capability.

### **Sources and methodology**

Government records, internal correspondence and policy documents and statements therefore constitute the major textual sources for this thesis. Obviously the first area of attention for any study of such documents is the text itself. In isolation, published political texts tend to be very convincing and they appear cohesive and substantial; that is what they are designed to do. Similarly, internal correspondence is not designed to elucidate policy to historical researchers but to influence its development in a particular direction. It was thus imperative that the context of the publication of the document; who wrote it; under what instructions; to what end and; with what audience in mind, was fully understood; before any critical analysis of the document was attempted.

Media records have been key sources; newspaper and television or radio articles are as vulnerable to contextual exploitation as government records and needed to be treated just as sceptically. That said, they act both as primary and secondary sources – primary in the sense of being *prima facie* evidence of a public nuclear

discourse, and secondary in the sense of acting as sources of what other people have written or said in public. In terms of the debate on nuclear policy, all sources are liable to polemic bias and this includes media records and, especially, public statements by either politicians or campaigners. More emphasis has been accorded to contemporary records and speeches than retrospective records – hindsight is a formidable tool for political critique, but not for understanding why decisions in particular circumstances went a particular way.

Similarly, while this thesis seeks to be as objective as possible, the author (an ex-Commanding Officer of HMS Vengeance and HMS Vanguard) views the World from a Realist paradigm and believes that the most effective way to prevent nuclear and serious conventional war between the great powers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century World is balanced and credible nuclear deterrence.

The background information on the context of deterrent strategy decisions; especially any prevailing imperatives that led to them, has been fundamental to determine the pressures that may have genuinely affected the final shape of the strategy decisions. The imperatives of the Cold War in 1965 were different to those of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century but only through analysis of the context can the long term, personal and cultural pressures on decision-making be considered. Such analysis has been greatly enhanced through interviews with the very senior authors of some of the original decisions, a number of whom have very generously given of their time. Interviews with these very senior policymakers provided much primary source information and invaluable context for the government documents and records, and the author is indebted for their openness.

Departmental policy positions within government tend to attract a degree of departmental loyalty, and the author's personal experience suggests that reticence over nuclear deterrence issues is not limited to the public sphere but is ubiquitous within the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office. There is an understandable natural tendency to avoid discussion because of perceived security implications, but while many of the capability and performance statistics are classified, the vast majority of the more broadly based issues associated with nuclear deterrence are not. They do tend to be treated with extreme sensitivity however, both by experts who routinely deal with the nuclear deterrent, and those whose contact with it is more peripheral. Most of the issues associated with the nuclear deterrent therefore tend not to be officially articulated within the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, nor are they discussed except informally amongst peers.

There were therefore sensitive issues to be expected in the research phase of this paper. Those interviewed to establish the factors affecting policy formulation could be expected to be all too aware of this and were anticipated to be uncomfortable being completely frank. There is a finite, but limited, risk that adverse comment in interview could be professionally detrimental. For these reasons, this study was conducted with Research Ethics Approval.<sup>22</sup>

## **Security**

Obviously, expert discussion of nuclear deterrence tends to involve material that is by its nature extremely classified. Whilst published government papers themselves are unclassified documents, supporting papers tend to be of a much more limited distribution and of a significantly higher security classification. During the research phase of the study, it was an overriding requirement that any information of a classified nature stays that way. Every element of preparation has been checked at every stage to ensure that the final thesis and all notes and records are unclassified. No classified documents were consulted during this study, although declassified documents in the National Archives constitute the bulk of the primary sources.

In interview, the line between unclassified discussion points and those of more sensitivity could have been much more easily breached. Thus, when discussing interview plans with potential interviewees, security aspects were dealt with and agreed beforehand. In the event, with similarly experienced and security conscious professionals both conducting the interviews and being interviewed, there were no instances where security issues were a concern.

## **Statistical research**

Due to the hugely complex and emotive nature of nuclear policy derivation, especially the importance of individuals' actions in determining the course of events, surveys and quantitative analysis are of limited relevance to this study. The epistemological limitations involved in quantitative analysis are too narrowly prescriptive to allow convincing substantial conclusions to be drawn in this area of policy and grand strategy. In order to perform the extremely sophisticated regressions involved, so many very serious assumptions have to be bounded; from the definition of war to the order in which the variables are input into the model, that

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<sup>22</sup> Granted RESC Full Approval reference SSSL/11/12-20 dated 8 June 2012

quantitative analysis of this area is very prone to omission of perturbing variables and for the purpose of this thesis is not likely to yield results proportional to the effort involved.<sup>23</sup> No quantitative analysis is intended during this research. Equally, there is no attempt to provide any kind of data mining or discourse analysis of government public engagement; whilst that may well provide a great deal of information. This study is focused on the information available to the decision makers, and what influence that information had, not on subsequent analysis of the same issues with different information.

### **Study methodology**

The study of contemporary government policy throws up unique challenges and opportunities. Historical analysis can generally excise the influence of polemic at the first stage of analysis of primary sources, and a degree of objectivity can be achieved purely by the separation in time between the study and the protagonists. Study of primary documentary sources entailed careful consideration of the derivation of each document in order to identify its political context. This was easier for earlier sources (pre-1985) but more recent sources have to be assessed in their public context, without the benefit of the classified Cabinet discussions which informed the decision making processes. For more recent government engagement with the public discourse, therefore, interviews with key decision makers and opinion-formers have been critical in order to provide some of that context. It is for this reason that the thesis will consider activities only up to the 2015 General Election.

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<sup>23</sup> See; SINGER, J. 1972. The Correlates of War Project. *World Politics*, 24, 243-270. and DESSLER, D. 1991. Beyond Correlations: Toward a Causal Theory of War. *International Studies Quarterly*, 35, 337-355.

## Chapter Two: The War Game; a case study

This analysis of the fate of 'The War Game', a radical film about the effects of nuclear weapons made in 1965 provides a clear illustration of the ambiguity of government engagement with the public on nuclear deterrence policy in the context of the height of the Cold War. It is based on an extended interview with the Director of 'The War Game', review of the film and its historical context, analysis of the official record and consideration of a protracted historiographical debate about the fate of the film.

In May 1965, a fictional BBC television documentary drama depicting the possible aftermath of a nuclear attack on Britain was completed and the initial draft shown to the Controller of BBC2, Huw Wheldon. Five months later, the BBC announced it had decided not to air the programme on television because it was an 'artistic failure'.<sup>1</sup> It was subsequently given a limited cinematic release and won the 1966 Venice Film Festival Award for the best documentary, and the best documentary Academy Award (Oscar) in 1967. Eventually, the BBC first screened it on television on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1985, twenty years after its completion. To this day, its director insists that the film was suppressed because of its political impact.<sup>2</sup>

From the beginning Wheldon was well aware of the political impact that the film might have and insisted on close supervision of the filming process. As the Head of Documentary programming he had commissioned the film in the first instance. Even before filming started he was in close liaison with Grace Wyndham Goldie (Head of Talks at BBC) who supported the film in principle; 'I have discussed this several times with HTG, who thinks the film should be made, so long as there is no security risk and the facts are authentic, the people should be trusted with the truth...'<sup>3</sup> This is the essential question here; what is it that prevents government trusting people with the truth?

In parallel, there was an ongoing dialogue with the Home Office throughout filming, with Wheldon insisting on editorial independence despite;

'...the Home Office argu[ing] that as 'partners in the civil defence field', the government and Corporation ought to work together

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<sup>1</sup> WATKINS, P. 2007. Peter Watkins; filmmaker/ media critic [Online]. MNSI. Available: <http://pwatkins.mnsi.net/index.htm> [Accessed 3 January 2013].

<sup>2</sup> WATKINS, P. Interview with A S Corbett 27 Sept 2012.

<sup>3</sup> BBC WAC T56/263/1 Wheldon to Kenneth Adam 31 Dec 64 quoted in CHAPMAN, J. 2006. The BBC and the Censorship of The War Game (1965). *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, 75-94. P81



throughout production to ensure that the film was 'prepared with the utmost care and responsibility' given its potentially harmful effects on the public.'<sup>4</sup>

The film's director, Peter Watkins, had previously directed 'Culloden', a dramatic depiction of the fate of the 1645 Jacobite Rebels at the eponymous battle, and that film had been well received critically and publicly. Watkins had a list of difficult topics which he wanted to address with his docu-drama format, challenging both received wisdom on the subject matter, and also stretching the use of television as a medium for entertainment and information. Watkins's intent was to 'challenge viewers' assumptions and provoke different perspectives.'<sup>5</sup> Top of his list was nuclear war.

Watkins's research was meticulous, including interviews with survivors of Second World War mass bombing raids, both British and German, and members of the emergency and police services. He also sent a number of detailed questionnaires to government departments and local government offices regionally, inquiring specifically into the detailed preparations being made in civil defence in the early 1960s. From its very inception, 'The War Game' was potentially politically contentious. It set out to televise a depiction of the aftermath of nuclear war that directly challenged the official view.

Inherently pacifist, Watkins was perturbed by the lack of public information and understanding of the nature of nuclear war, and by the government claims about the effectiveness of preparations being made for civil defence within the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> This is the central refrain of the film and is literally echoed by the narrator at the end of the film as the camera pans across a group of children orphaned by the nuclear attack;

'On almost the entire subject of thermo-nuclear weapons; problems of their possession; effects of their use; there is now practically total silence; in the press, in official publications and on television. There is hope in any unresolved and unpredictable situation but is there a real hope to be found in this silence?'<sup>7</sup>

The War Game is filmed using handheld cameras in a highly dynamic 'newsreel' style, closely reflecting the contemporary footage being returned from the conflict in

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<sup>4</sup> BBC WAC, T16/679/1: Winther to Arkell, 22 Jan. 1965 ; R 78/2, 680/1: Winther to Arkell, 16 Feb. 1965 ; Arkell to Greene, 18 Feb. 1965 . Quoted in SHAW, T. 2006. The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television's The War Game (1965). *The English Historical Review*, 121, 34. p1360

<sup>5</sup> WATKINS, P. Interview with A S Corbett 27 Sept 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *The War Game*, 1965. DVD. Directed by WATKINS, P. London: British Film Institute.

Vietnam. The actors are almost all amateurs, locals of the town where the film was made. The film portrays plausible outcomes of a nuclear war, starting with the immediate aftermath of blast and heat; already well understood. The memories of the bombing raids of the Second World War were still vivid to many. The War Game specifically parodies the Civil Defence Information films being produced by the Home Office; the narrator repeatedly uses the phrase 'This is what nuclear war means' which had been a central motif of 'Doom Town'; a 1955 Pathé Civil Defence training film depicting search and rescue in burnt-out buildings.<sup>8</sup>

The Government Civil Defence Corps had produced a number of training films and publicity 'shorts' in the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>9</sup> These films depicted Civil Defence exercises and scenarios which were scripted to run up to the evacuation of casualties to conveniently located first aid posts where assistance from unaffected areas was available. The rescue services always appeared in control and there was a clear message that civil defence was a viable response to a nuclear attack. The War Game scenario develops beyond this point and the film portrays the failure of the civil defence organisation to respond to the demands of ever-increasing casualties, including the inadequate provision of medical care, mercy killings of the very seriously burned casualties by the police and mass cremations in order to prevent spread of disease. As time passes in the film, the situation changes from one of an immediate emergency to one of protracted crisis due to failure of the civil defence organisation, leading to food shortages, looting and finally the imposition of martial law on the streets; graphically depicted in the execution of food rioters by police firing squad.

Throughout, this fabricated newsreel footage is interspersed with interviews to camera of equally fictitious 'establishment figures' such as a bishop, government ministers, officials and senior military officers. These interviews are filmed at desks or in offices and they rehearse genuine government statements on civil defence planning; assurances that procedures and processes are in place to ensure that nuclear war is survivable. Immediately after each official statement, the film depicts its 'reality', directly in counterpoint to the reassuring view of the 'establishment figure'. This reality includes live unscripted interviews with members of the public who were actually participating in the filming. They were asked real questions and answered from their real viewpoints. Watkins later said; 'And those questions and responses – particularly the responses – are perhaps the biggest single indictment

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<sup>8</sup> *Doom Town*, 1955. Newsreel. Directed by PATHE. London: Pathe.

<sup>9</sup> *Nuclear War in Britain; Home Front Civil Defence Films 1951-1987*, 2010. Strikeforce TV.

in the entire film of the way we are conducting our present society and of the lack of common public knowledge of the things which effect humanity.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, the effect is that the fictional newsreel and interview footage completely discredits the genuine government statements and Civil Defence Organisation assurances.

### **The decision not to show *The War Game***

Despite Wheldon's support, *The War Game* caused considerable unease within the BBC hierarchy during its production. Filming was completed in April 1965, and Watkins completed his initial editing by mid-June. The first cut was screened to Watkins's panel of expert consultants on 17<sup>th</sup> June and to Wheldon and Richard Cawston (Wheldon's replacement as Head of Documentaries) on 24<sup>th</sup> June. After each of these screenings, the film was edited further. After a further screening to BBC publicity officers, the re-edited film was viewed again by Cawston on 18<sup>th</sup> August and he gave the film a provisional broadcast date of 7<sup>th</sup> October, to be followed by 'Tonight'. However, on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, Hugh Carleton-Greene (BBC Director General) and Lord Normanbrook (Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors) viewed the film and decided to 'take soundings' from Whitehall. As an ex-Cabinet Secretary, and Chair of the 1954 'Committee on Nuclear Defence and Civil Defence', Normanbrook would have been very aware of the potential domestic impact of the film. He wrote to the Cabinet Secretary that the film;

'...has been made with considerable restraint. But the subject is, necessarily, alarming; and the showing of the film on television might well have a significant effect on public attitudes towards the deterrent ...I doubt that the BBC alone should take the responsibility of deciding whether this film should be shown...'<sup>11</sup>

When informed of this decision by Wheldon, Watkins resigned over what he saw as political interference in the independence of BBC.<sup>12</sup>

On 24<sup>th</sup> September, *The War Game* was screened to senior government officials including the Cabinet Secretary Sir Burke Trend, the Permanent Secretaries from the Home Office, and the Ministry of Defence and a senior officer representing the Chief of Defence Staff. Trend clearly understood the government position very well, writing in October to the Lord President and Prime Minister that 'The War Game was unbalanced and pessimistic about civil defence, but that 'the dilemma for the

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<sup>10</sup> ROSENTHAL, A. 1971. *New Documentary in Action: Casebook in Film Making*, Berkeley, University of California Press. p160

<sup>11</sup> BBC WAC, T16/679/1: Controllers' Minutes, 6 Sept. 1965 Quoted in SHAW, T. 2006. The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television's *The War Game* (1965). *The English Historical Review*, 121, 34. P1366

<sup>12</sup> WATKINS, P. Interview with A S Corbett 27 Sept 2012.

government ... was that it could not afford to give the impression that, by overriding the BBC's duty to educate, it was sweeping under the rug an issue which ministers found politically embarrassing.<sup>13</sup> Trend met Normanbrook again on 5<sup>th</sup> November and Normanbrook records that the '... decision should be left to the discretion of the BBC. ... it is also clear that Whitehall will be relieved if the BBC chooses not to show it.'<sup>14</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> November, Normanbrook wrote to Trend to inform him that the BBC had decided not to show the film. A BBC press release on 26<sup>th</sup> November read 'this is the BBC's own decision ... not as a result of outside pressure of any kind.'<sup>15</sup> The Times reported this release, including; '... the film has been judged by the BBC to be too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting.'<sup>16</sup>

There were questions asked about the degree of government involvement in the BBC's decision in both houses of Parliament, but government officials and ministers, including Prime Minister Harold Wilson, simply reiterated that; 'The Government have not interfered in any way with ... any of these programmes. As regards rumours about 'The War Game', the Government have not interfered at all.'<sup>17</sup> Peter Watkins remains in absolutely no doubt that the government applied pressure to the BBC to inhibit the showing of The War Game.<sup>18</sup>

### **The historiographical debate about The War Game**

There was undoubtedly contact between the hierarchy of the BBC and very senior government officials prior to the decision being made. The extent to which that contact manifested as pressure on the BBC is unlikely ever to be established definitively from the official records. There is clearly a degree of historiographical debate about the exact decision-making process that resulted in the censorship of The War Game; at least three historians have independently assessed substantially the same evidence and reached substantively different conclusions. Two of the articles cited above, both published in 2006, reflect a common understanding of the historical narrative, but with different interpretations and conclusions. Chapman concludes;

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. TNA PREM 13/139 Trend to Wilson 8 Oct 65; S251 box 8 'The Story of the War Game' Quoted in SHAW, T. 2006. The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television's The War Game (1965). *The English Historical Review*, 121, 34. P1368

<sup>14</sup> BBC WAC, T16/679/1: Normanbrook to Greene, 5 Nov. 1965 Quoted in SHAW, T. 2006. The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television's The War Game (1965). *The English Historical Review*, 121, 34. p1370

<sup>15</sup> BBC WAC R44/1334/1 FL Cobb (Acting Day Press Officer) 26 Nov 1965 Quoted in; CHAPMAN, J. 2006. The BBC and the Censorship of The War Game (1965). *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, 75-94. P89

<sup>16</sup> TIMES. Film 'Too Horrifying' For Television., 27 November 1965, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister Harold Wilson 30 Nov 1965 Hansard, 5th Series, v 721, c. 1230

<sup>18</sup> WATKINS, P. Interview with A S Corbett 27 Sept 2012.

‘... the decision not to show *The War Game* on television was largely consensual. ... That there was pressure from Whitehall (not from Westminster) not to show the film cannot be doubted ...’<sup>19</sup>

In a formatted letter sent to those who had written to the BBC to complain, the BBC wrote; ‘There was an element of experiment in this project ... Such programme experiments sometimes fail ...’<sup>20</sup> This is not quite the view expressed by the Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors; he had admitted on first seeing it that the film was an impressive documentary but he clearly had reservations about its political impact since he also insisted that the responsibility for showing it was too great for the BBC to shoulder alone.<sup>21</sup> ‘In making this decision, the BBC had to set aside its own belief that the probable effects of nuclear warfare should be made known to the public, if at all possible, through the medium of television.’<sup>22</sup> This does appear to concur with Wyndham Goldie’s comment that the people should be trusted with the truth, but it then rather begs the question why the BBC had to set aside its own beliefs and not show the film. The BBC’s letter continued;

‘...most of those who saw it were very deeply affected, and believed that it had the power to produce unpredictable emotions and moral difficulties whose resolution called for balance of judgement of the highest order ...’<sup>23</sup>

*The War Game* vividly challenged the sterile depictions of the aftermath of nuclear war shown in the Civil Defence Corps training films and the Pathé news reports. The opportunity to inform ‘balanced judgement of the highest order’ is exactly what Watkins was seeking to promote; a genuine debate about nuclear weapons policy. By not showing the film, the BBC did not provide that opportunity, and according to some commentators, deliberately stifled it; ‘... *The War Game* was censored for politically motivated reasons ... the state was intimately involved in the BBC’s decision and that there was nothing ‘ad hoc’ about the process.’<sup>24</sup> The BBC had written in 1965;

‘The BBC has, therefore, reluctantly decided that, because of its nature, this film cannot be broadcast. ... In making this decision, the

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<sup>19</sup> CHAPMAN, J. 2006. The BBC and the Censorship of *The War Game* (1965). *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, 75-94. P93

<sup>20</sup> BBC unreferenced letter signed ‘O G TAYLOR’ dated 23rd December 1965. Peter Watkins’s private archive

<sup>21</sup> SHAW, T. 2006. The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television’s *The War Game* (1965). *The English Historical Review*, 121, 34. P1366

<sup>22</sup> BBC unreferenced letter signed ‘O G TAYLOR’ dated 23rd December 1965. Peter Watkins’s private archive

<sup>23</sup> BBC unreferenced letter signed ‘O G TAYLOR’ dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1965. Peter Watkins’s private archive

<sup>24</sup> WAYNE, M. 2007. Failing the Public: The BBC, *The War Game* and Revisionist History A Reply to James Chapman. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 11. P627

BBC acted on its own judgement. There was no outside pressure. In particular, we received no advice from Government Departments or officials about whether or not the film should be shown on the air.'<sup>25</sup>

Shaw concludes that; 'Available records fail to make it clear precisely who took the decision to pull *The War Game* and when.'<sup>26</sup> Wayne's article above was a direct challenge to Chapman, but the most salient point from their exchange for this study is; 'In its own way, Wayne's passionate and polemical response is further evidence of the controversy that continues to surround the BBC's decision not to broadcast *The War Game* ...'<sup>27</sup> Based on substantially the same evidence, Chapman and Wayne disagreed fundamentally about who took the decision, and why, and they perpetuated the debate that had been running for nearly 40 years. Shaw was non-committal about the precise origin of the decision not to show *The War Game*. Instead he viewed the impact of the decision from the slightly longer term.

The evidence is compelling that the BBC consulted government officials, who, whether or not they actually coerced the BBC decision, clearly felt that *The War Game* was in some way 'hazardous'. Trend's memo to Wilson suggests that the Cabinet Office felt that the government was in a cleft stick; it could neither suppress the film for fear of being accused of suppressing it, nor allow it to be aired, for fear of the concerns it would raise.<sup>28</sup>

The analysis of the events surrounding the suppression of *The War Game* to date has focussed on the extent to which the government influenced the BBC decision. The debate above concentrated on whether the government effectively compelled the BBC's decision (Wayne) or was merely a more passive party to it (Chapman and to a lesser extent Shaw). There is, however, a clear consensus that the film was suppressed. But none of the articles addressed in any depth the assumption which underlies all three; why would the government want to suppress *The War Game*?

### **The question underlying the debate about *The War Game***

Much of the information associated with nuclear deterrence capability and limitations is necessarily very highly classified and therefore not at all appropriate for

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<sup>25</sup> BBC unreferenced letter signed 'O G TAYLOR' dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1965. Peter Watkins's private archive

<sup>26</sup> SHAW, T. 2006. The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television's *The War Game* (1965). *The English Historical Review*, 121, 34. P1372

<sup>27</sup> CHAPMAN, J. 2008. "The War Game" Controversy - Again. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 8. P105

<sup>28</sup> TNA PREM 13/139 Trend to Wilson 8 Oct 65; S251 box 8 'The Story of the War Game' Quoted in SHAW, T. 2006. The BBC, the State and Cold War Culture: The Case of Television's *The War Game* (1965). *The English Historical Review*, 121, 34. P1368

the public domain. There is, especially in the middle of a war, even a 'Cold' War, some information that is just too sensitive for public dissemination. In 1962 five members of the radical anti-nuclear protest group, the Committee of 100, who had planned a protest outside nuclear and civil defence bases and thus compromised their locations, had been convicted of offences against the Official Secrets Act and received custodial sentences.<sup>29</sup>

As a result of a Cabinet Office study (the Strath Report) of 1955, the government knew all too well that the civil defence procedures and capabilities were inadequate. The War Game promised to ridicule the claims of the Civil Defence Organisation and to challenge government claims that a nuclear war would be survivable. In particular, the loss of control by the Civil Defence Organisation and Police Forces reflected accurately the concept of 'breakdown' highlighted by the Strath Report and subsequently in very highly classified government studies; 'when the government of a country is no longer able to ensure that its orders are carried out. This state of affairs could come about through breakdown of the machinery of control.'<sup>30</sup>

Therefore it could be argued that there was a national security issue raised by The War Game and the government did not want the shortfalls to become public (or Soviet) knowledge, hence the desire to have it suppressed. But had security really been a salient issue, the government would have been able to stop transmission of The War Game through well-established 'D-Notice' procedures, with none of the attendant publicity.<sup>31</sup> There was no genuine concern about security expressed in the government papers of the time; merely that The War Game exposed issues that might be 'embarrassing.'

There was an ongoing debate within government as to whether spending on civil defence should be increased or whether to rely on investment in active elements of deterrence on the assumption that war could be deterred in the first place, and the need for civil defence obviated.<sup>32</sup> In general, government decisions about nuclear weapons policy had been kept within very limited circles since Churchill had authorised the Tube Alloys project in absolute secrecy in 1942: 'Mr Churchill had vigorously insisted that knowledge of the atomic bomb be kept to the smallest

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<sup>29</sup> TAYLOR, R. & PRITCHARD, C. 1980. *The Protest Makers; The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-1965, Twenty Years On*, Oxford, Pergamon. P12

<sup>30</sup> HENNESSY, P. 2010. *The Secret State*, London, Penguin Books Ltd. P179

<sup>31</sup> See description of D Notice system in chapter 5 below

<sup>32</sup> HENNESSY, P. 2010. *The Secret State*, London, Penguin Books Ltd. Ch5 pp179-216

possible circle of Ministers and advisers.<sup>33</sup> Veteran parliamentarian Tony Benn notes as a junior MP in 1950;

‘As for the nuclear issues, my first involvement in that was when I tried to put down a question about nuclear weapons, having discovered that the Labour government had built the atomic bomb without telling parliament. I was sternly rebuked by Attlee, which at the time was quite frightening.’<sup>34</sup>

On returning to government in 1951, Churchill had been astonished to discover the extent of atomic expenditure that had been secretly made by Attlee’s administration; ‘How was it that the £100 millions for atomic research and manufacture was provided without Parliament being informed? How was this very large sum accounted for?’<sup>35</sup> During his second term as Prime Minister, Churchill was more open with Cabinet and Parliament about nuclear matters than Attlee had been but even so, there appears to have been very limited public discourse on nuclear policy in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. Even in the face of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament activities which reached their peak at the turn of the decade, there was persistent government reticence about nuclear matters. (See Chapters 4 and 5 below).

The fate of *The War Game* acts as a useful case study into this reticence. Four months after the decision not to air *The War Game*, the BBC arranged a cinematic screening to an invited audience of MPs, journalists (mostly war correspondents) and others by invitation in February 1966. It received reviews ranging from; ‘A Warning Masterpiece; It may be the most important film ever made’<sup>36</sup> to ‘Muddle-Minded Mr Watkins’<sup>37</sup> or ‘One Ban the BBC need not have Defended’<sup>38</sup> In March 1966, the British Film Institute was given a limited licence to screen *The War Game* and it was granted an X certificate by the British Board of Film Censors; ‘... *The War Game* was a brilliant film which he [the secretary of the British Board of Film Censors] thought should be shown in cinemas.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> GOWING, M. 1974. *Independence and deterrence: Britain and atomic energy 1945–1952*, vol. 1, London, Macmillan. P5

<sup>34</sup> BENN, T. 1982. *Parliament, People and Power; Agenda for a Free Society*, London, Verso. P4

<sup>35</sup> CABINET OFFICE Untitled Memorandum Churchill (PM) to Bridges (Treasury) dated 8 Dec 51. TNA PREM 11/297.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Observer’ Quoted in WATKINS, P. 2007. *Peter Watkins; filmmaker/ media critic* [Online]. MNSI. Available: <http://pwatkins.mnsi.net/index.htm> [Accessed 3 January 2013].

<sup>37</sup> ‘Daily Express’ *ibid*.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Daily Mirror’ *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> Secretary of the BBFC quoted in TIMES. 1966. Cinemas to show *The War Game*. 4 March 1966, p.12.



The film itself was virtually judged *in absentia* by newspapers and the fate of the film became the story, rather than the story being about the scenario it depicted and the issues it raised. Mrs Stella Reading, the Chairman of the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence wrote, shortly before the BFI licence was granted;

'The reported decision of the BBC to make *The War Game* available to the National Film Institute for public showing ... is to my mind a grave error of judgement. ... If the argument is that the film should be shown in the interests of truth, then let us have *all* the truth, not only the certainty of enormous destruction and loss of life but the equal certainty that with efficient national preparation many millions of lives could be saved'.<sup>40</sup>

By 1966, the (Top Secret) Strath Report was a decade old. Nuclear weapons had grown exponentially in capability and the damage that could be expected in the UK in the late 1960s was immeasurably greater than that in 1955. However, in line with the decision to rely on deterrence, Civil Defence funding had been reduced, not increased, after 1960, and Civil Defence Corps numbers had fallen from a 1960 peak of 360000 to 140000 in 1965. In 1965, the Civil Defence Corps was put into a minimal budget 'care and maintenance' stance by the Labour Government Home Defence Review.<sup>41</sup> It is not clear whether Mrs Reading knew of the Strath Report, in which case her letter would have been a piece of breathtaking hypocrisy, or (far more likely) she was completely ignorant of the report and its ramifications, despite her position of apparent authority, and she was simply convinced of the efficacy of 'efficient national preparation'.

The BBC made the decision not to show *The War Game*, and then made the decision to allow it a limited cinematic release. It was an Oscar-winning success, not an experimental failure. It depicted a narrative of nuclear war that was familiar to government officials. The concept of breakdown was officially understood yet the 'Civil Defence Handbook No 10'<sup>42</sup> (the extant volume in 1965) and the Civil Defence training and information films were sanitised to the point of sterility, particularly on the prospects for law and order following an attack. The arguments about the accuracy of the fiction depicted by *The War Game* were played out in public, but by proxy.

Whether or not the BBC asserted the independence of its decision not to show *The War Game*, it did decide only after extensive and detailed consultation with

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<sup>40</sup> READING, S. 1966. Why Film Should Not be Shown. *Times*, 01 Mar 1966, p.13.

<sup>41</sup> HENNESSY, P. 2010. *The Secret State*, London, Penguin Books Ltd. P178-186

<sup>42</sup> HOME OFFICE 1963. Civil Defence Handbook No 10: Advising the Householder on Protection Against Nuclear Attack. London: HMSO.

government officials, which both denied publicly. The debate in the letters sections of the press was conducted by the Chairman of the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence and other quasi-government spokesmen, or especially interested Members of Parliament, from either camp. Anti-Nuclear lobbyists were vocal, the film gave the waning membership of the CND a rallying point, but it was short-lived. The one participant in this debate conspicuous by its absence is an authoritative government voice; why?

In 1965, there was almost total silence on the subject of nuclear weapons. The withdrawal of *The War Game* highlighted that issue, but even then the government did not intervene either in discussion about the fate of the film, nor the core issue. After a review of pertinent literature, the analysis chapters of this thesis will consider the historical evolution of British government engagement with the public and seek to establish what factors led to the 'total silence' of *The War Game* narrator quoted above.

## **Chapter Three: Investigating the factors influencing nuclear deterrence policy**

### **Literature Review**

The factors influencing government thinking and decisions on nuclear deterrence are myriad and related in very complex relationships. Few can be considered in isolation, but the impact of the historical context, the experience, prejudices, opinions and the beliefs of the senior officials and politicians are often neglected as factors in this process.<sup>1</sup>

Other work has considered the evolution of UK nuclear deterrence capabilities, strategy, policy, ethics and anti-nuclear movements. This thesis will consider each of these as factors in a succession of historical decisions made in specific circumstances under specific pressures and limitations. The social changes over the same period have been the subject of considerable analysis elsewhere, and this work will be addressed only where it pertains directly to the research question. The literature associated with British nuclear deterrence is, itself, substantial, and this thematic review will concentrate on those publications which are directly relevant to the thesis arguments – there is no place here for detailed tactical, technical or strategic appraisals of NATO deterrence policy, nor the UK role within that, except as it pertains to this thesis.

### **Social change in Britain**

There are numerous models of change in Britain's political and cultural make up in the Twentieth Century. Robinson et al suggest that there has been a dominant meta-narrative; 'that organizes post-war British history into three periods: social democracy, 'crisis' and the triumph of 'neoliberalism'.<sup>2</sup> In a broad assessment of competing social meta-narratives, they focus on the 1970s as the crisis of British politics; 'the decade when the social democratic settlement is said to have broken under the weight of its economic, social and post-colonial contradictions, supplanted by an intellectually vigorous and well- organized neoliberalism...'<sup>3</sup>

Inglehart suggests that class-based and economic issues were challenged as the dominant election issues in the 1960s and early 1970s by other non-material issues such as overseas aid and the extension of civil liberties, reflecting the increasing

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<sup>1</sup> BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2014. *The British Nuclear Experience: The Roles of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford, OUP. Particularly pp 206-218

<sup>2</sup> ROBINSON, E., SCHOFIELD, C., SUTCLIFFE-BRAITHWAITE, F. & THOMLINSON, N. 2017. Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s. *Twentieth Century British History*, 28, 268-304. p268

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p269

affluence of the majority of the population in that period.<sup>4</sup> O'Connor argues that the mass democracy of the post-war state demanded the '...capacity to secure consensus...' especially, but not exclusively, in economic policy.<sup>5</sup> Describing the '... strong commitment to the anti-nuclear peace movement [of the ] ... new urban left', Dunleavy nevertheless suggests that the electoral focus reverted to materialist concerns after the economic crises of the 1970s; 'Although expectations of a growth of post-material politics have not been borne out, neither have these issues disappeared ...'<sup>6</sup> Robinson et al cite a number of challenges to this accepted orthodoxy, before concluding that; '...the 1970s was a key moment in the spread of a popular, aspirational form of individualism in post-war Britain, and that this development is critical to our understanding of the history of the post-war years.'<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the cause they ascribe, cultural and economic models of British politics tend to converge on the idea that there was a revolutionary change in the nature of the relationship between government and the British population during the Twentieth Century, with the 1970s described as the 'Crisis of British Politics.'<sup>8</sup> Hobsbawm described this 'cultural revolution' as;

'... the triumph of the individual over society, or rather the breaking of the threads which in the past had woven human beings into social textures. For such textures had consisted not only of the actual relations between human beings and their forms of organisation but also of the general models of such relations and the expected patterns of people's behaviour towards each other...'<sup>9</sup>

The causes of these changes are not germane to this enquiry. Pearce concludes:

'[political historians] must work alongside social, economic, diplomatic and industrial historians in a collaborative venture, seeing our own research in the context provided by that of others. .... If on the whole, they lack a grasp of conceptual theory, they make up for this with empirical rigour. As a result, there are very few important 'schools of thought' among them.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> INGLEHART, R. 1981. Post-materialism in an environment of insecurity. *American Political Science Review*, 75, 880-899.

<sup>5</sup> O'CONNOR, J. 1987. *The Meaning of Crisis; a Theoretical Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell. p10

<sup>6</sup> DUNLEAVY, P. 1989. The End of Class Politics? In: COCHRANE, A. & ANDERSON, J. (eds.) *Restructuring Britain; Politics in Transition*. London: Sage. p209

<sup>7</sup> ROBINSON, E., SCHOFIELD, C., SUTCLIFFE-BRAITHWAITE, F. & THOMLINSON, N. 2017. Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s. *Twentieth Century British History*, 28, 268-304. p304

<sup>8</sup> COCHRANE, A. 1989. Britain's Political Crisis. In: COCHRANE, A. & ANDERSON, J. (eds.) *Restructuring Britain; Politics in Transition*. London: Sage. p35

<sup>9</sup> HOBSBAWM, E. 1995. *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century*, London, Abacus. P334

<sup>10</sup> PEARCE, R. 1997. Political History. In: BUTLER, L. & GORST, A. (eds.) *Modern British History; A Guide to Study and Research*. London: Tauris.

The empirical analysis within this thesis suggests that the nature of the discourse between government and public on nuclear and other complex moral matters tends to retain the same characteristic paternalist reticence across the three periods. Chapters 4-6 will show that the language and concepts used *in camera* by Thatcher and Callaghan in the 1970s tend to be reminiscent of that used throughout the Cold War and by Lloyd George in 1917 and Attlee and Churchill in the 1940s. As Dunleavy concludes, not all political change manifested in electoral results;<sup>11</sup> despite the highly publicized activities of CND, nuclear weapons policy was not a significant electoral issue for the 1964 General Election nor the 1983 election, the two periods when nuclear policy was most in the news.

### **The evolution of thinking on strategic bombing – strategy and ethics**

Early hypotheses in the design of this study were that there was a link between the political handling of the strategic bombing campaigns of the Second World War and the public evolution of British nuclear policy and that the genesis of much of the British thinking about strategic bombing had actually been significantly shaped by the experiences of the First World War, in particular the domestic reactions to the bombing of London by German aircraft. Preston's account of the conduct of those raids in 1915, in the context of unrestricted submarine warfare and the use of poison gas in the trenches suggest that the nature of warfare had been forever changed;

'...those in high positions refused to believe in the face of all the evidence that Germany's political leaders and its military commanders would countenance the unleashing of attacks that in addition to being illegal would shatter long-cherished concepts of honor, decency, and 'civilized' behavior in warfare.'<sup>12</sup>

Preston examines this clash of concepts of civilised behaviour and the debate about the appropriate reactions to it, and although she does not reach a definite conclusion on this aspect, appears to side with Lord Derby (Minister of War in 1917); 'it would be better to be defeated, retaining honour, chivalry and humanity, rather than obtain a victory by methods which have brought upon Germany

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<sup>11</sup> DUNLEAVY, P. 1989. The End of Class Politics? In: COCHRANE, A. & ANDERSON, J. (eds.) *Restructuring Britain; Politics in Transition*. London: Sage. P209

<sup>12</sup> PRESTON, D. 2015. *A Higher Form of Killing: Six Weeks in World War One that Forever Changed the Nature of Warfare*. London and New York: Bloomsbury. Kindle Location 93

universal execration.<sup>13</sup> Conflict between this view and the imperative to have a capability to retaliate in kind, however morally reprehensible, has characterised the British approach to strategic bombing, and to nuclear weapons, ever since.

The history of Bomber Command operations is almost as emotive as discussion of nuclear deterrence, with the added complication of experience, memory, casualties and therefore strong emotion:

‘Moral arguments about the conduct of strategic bombing as also, no doubt, about other kinds of warfare and about war in general will always, and desirably so, continue. ... All that historians need seek to do is to reveal the evidence which deserves to influence whatever conclusions may be reached and, perhaps, to state their own. Strategic arguments, on the other hand, must ultimately, in theory at least, be capable of being brought much nearer to accord.’<sup>14</sup>

Frankland and Webster produced the official history of the Strategic Air Offensive against Germany in 1961, in a febrile atmosphere with heated historiographical debate about the morality of the campaign, and who had ordered and sustained it; ‘it must be always kept in mind that the bombing directives were necessarily determined at the highest level, in this period by the British Chiefs of Staff and the Defence Committee of the Cabinet.’<sup>15</sup> If they achieved nothing else, Frankland and Webster stated clearly for posterity the perils of too close an association between policy and capability, absent strategy and understanding of strategic factors:

‘The appreciation of the operational capacities of the force was greatly over-optimistic, as also was that of the vulnerability of the German war economy to the attacks which could be brought to bear against it. Thus, with means far less effective than expected, Bomber Command had to undertake a task far more formidable than expected.’<sup>16</sup>

In reaching his conclusions, Overy tends to consider the bombing campaign from the operational level,<sup>17</sup> and extrapolates his analyses into policy, leading to the suggestion that ‘Hitler personally mistook Allied strategy for one of morale-breaking instead of one of economic warfare, with the collapse of morale as a possible

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* Kindle Location 4286

<sup>14</sup> FRANKLAND, N. 1965. *The Bombing Offensive Against Germany; Outlines and Perspectives*, London, Faber and Faber. p120

<sup>15</sup> WEBSTER, C. & FRANKLAND, N. 1961a. *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol I - Preparation*, London, HMSO. P269.

<sup>16</sup> WEBSTER, C. & FRANKLAND, N. 1961b. *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol III - Victory*, London, HMSO. P285

<sup>17</sup> The operational level of war is the level at which campaigns and major military operations are planned and sustained. MOD British Military Doctrine: Joint Warfare Publication 0-01 (2001). London: MOD. P1

additional bonus.<sup>18</sup> Overy considered the inter-war experience and suggests that both the RAF and the US Army Air Corps regarded strategic bombing of civilians as a viable means of war; quoting the US Manual of Combined Air Tactics of 1926;

‘The objective is selected with a view to undermining the enemy's morale . . . Such employment of air forces is a method of imposing will by terrorizing the whole population of a belligerent country . . .’<sup>19</sup>

In a comprehensive analysis of the subsequent strategic bombing campaigns, he concludes;

‘In Britain the bombing of Germany could always be given a wartime moral justification with the argument that the German Air Force began the campaign against civilian targets . . . The morality of a tooth for a tooth had a raw biblical sense to it which could be widely endorsed even by those who only a few years before had campaigned for the international abolition of bomber aircraft.’<sup>20</sup>

Overy also considered that the bombing operations had clear strategic effect in that they reduced German industrial output and tied up other military assets such as guns and aircraft that could otherwise have been employed for other military purposes to the detriment of the Allies.<sup>21</sup>

Hastings considers the operations to a similar degree of detail, but has a greater level of consideration of the political imperatives and ramifications. In a line redolent of Walzer's ‘Hypocrisy is rife in wartime discourse, because it is especially important at such a time to appear to be in the right,’<sup>22</sup> Hastings suggests that ‘Much of the reasoning that led to the mass morale bombing of Germany took place in the silence of men's minds, and was never articulated in minutes or memoranda.’<sup>23</sup>

Although Hastings reflects more of the political and strategic decision-making, both he and Overy remain pretty much agnostic about any kind of moral judgement of the strategic bombing campaign. Hastings is, however, implicitly critical of the decision to continue into 1945; ‘But February 1945 marked the moment when farsighted airmen and politicians began to perceive that history might judge the achievements of strategic air power with less enthusiasm than their own Target Intelligence departments’<sup>24</sup> Maier similarly struggled to rationalise the campaign;

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<sup>18</sup> OVERY, R. J. 1980. Hitler and Air Strategy. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15, 405-421.

<sup>19</sup> OVERY, R. J. 1992. Air power and the origins of deterrence theory before 1939. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 15, 28. pp74-75

<sup>20</sup> OVERY, R. J. 2013. *The Bombing War; Europe 1939-1945*, London, Penguin. P631

<sup>21</sup> OVERY, R. J. 1997. *Why the Allies Won*, London, W.W. Norton. p130

<sup>22</sup> WALZER, M. 1977b. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. p20

<sup>23</sup> HASTINGS, M. 2010. *Bomber Command*, Basingstoke and Oxford, Pan. P113

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p447

‘Yet at the end I am forced to confront inconsistencies and beliefs that I would rather avoid. *Jus in bello* remains at best an asymptotic guideline, never to be fully achieved, often to be hypocritically violated. But what other choice to do we have?’<sup>25</sup>

Howard, considering the concept of total war, concluded that;

‘Once it acquired the capacity to destroy German and Japanese cities, whether by conventional or, ultimately, nuclear means, it was almost inconceivable that the United States would not do so. Whatever the military necessity or ethical justification for using the first nuclear weapons, American public opinion would have found it hard to understand or forgive its government if it had not.’<sup>26</sup>

Total war challenges the very core of the concept of ‘civilians’ by recognising the ambiguity of civilian status and the non-innocent status of many alleged civilians, including factory workers, railway workers, dockyard workers etc. Therefore, while this distinction may be absolute in pure moral terms, it is a difficult differentiation to make, especially in terms of a publicly acceptable and simple dialogue in a time of national crisis, such as a war of national survival.

Taylor makes a similarly detailed analysis and (it feels almost against his better judgement) concludes that;

‘By not [stopping bombing cities], in fact by stepping up the bombing of Germany’s urban populations, the British, and to some extent the Americans, lost the moral high ground. ... All the same, there are a number of problems with this belief, some political and some practical. It is hard to believe that in the winter of 1944–45 a voluntary Anglo-American withdrawal from city bombing would have been acceptable to Allied public opinion – especially after German resistance stiffened in the autumn, to be followed in December by Hitler’s counterattack in the Ardennes ... and ... the V-1 and V-2 raids on Antwerp, Paris, London and southern England, which cost thousands of civilian lives and were terrifyingly indiscriminate by their very nature.’<sup>27</sup>

This strongly nuanced conclusion is typical of the majority of historical studies of this campaign. Few, however, consider the relationship between public opinion and the

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<sup>25</sup> MAIER, C. S. 2005. Targeting the city: Debates and silences about the aerial bombing of World War II. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 87, 429-444. p444

<sup>26</sup> HOWARD, M. 2005. Total War: Some Concluding Reflections. In: CHICKERING, R. & FORSTER, S. (eds.) *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction 1937-1945*. Kindle ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Kindle location 4544)

<sup>27</sup> TAYLOR, F. 2011. Dresden: Tuesday 13 February 1945. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. (Kindle location 7095-7104)



strategic direction of the campaign in detail, with Taylor's and Howard's asides above being typical of an assumed linkage.

Biddle provides chapter and verse on the operational implications of the bombing campaign on Germany's ability to continue to prosecute the war; '... of 19,713 88-mm and 128-mm dual purpose flak/ antitank artillery pieces produced between 1942 and 1944, all but 3,172 were allocated to air defense— denying the Wehrmacht a critical tool for the ground battle.'<sup>28</sup> Biddle's account of the gradual evolution of the RAF from a force that promised far more than it could deliver, to the Bomber Command of the 1000 bomber raids of 1943 *et seq*, is an account of bureaucratic ineptitude, British political fudge and individual efforts on an epic scale:

'During the Second World War, British and American air forces sought to prove the soundness of the central claim of the interwar years: that modern societies and economies are vulnerable to aerial bombardment. The claim proved weaker than expected. From the start its proponents faced two major problems: the vulnerability of bombers themselves to enemy defenses, and the inaccuracy of bombers operating in wartime conditions.'<sup>29</sup>

Biddle draws together many strands of cultural influence on the formation of strategy, including the experience of the first World war, the impact of fictional accounts of air and nuclear war (especially HG Wells), the wishful thinking of RAF strategic and operational planning during the interwar period, and the implications of technology on strategy, in a way not reflected elsewhere. It would be tempting to consider the 1930s a period where an embryonic theory of deterrence emerged; where the simple possession of the means to retaliate would deter aggression in the first place. I have found no evidence of that, however; the RAF was developing its strategic doctrine in order to fight a war, not to deter one.

In particular, Biddle's account of the problems with technical fulfilment of policy requirements paints a devastating picture of the state of RAF offensive capability in 1940: the bombers had no means of precise night navigation, and had no night bomb sights so could not target accurately, the aircraft were not capable of delivering large loads, their operating range was limited and the exercise programmes conducted in the late 1930s were designed to emphasise the capabilities of the force, not consider its limitations.<sup>30</sup> She concludes;

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<sup>28</sup> BIDDLE, T. D. 2002. Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing 1914-1945.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p9

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. pp88-90

‘None of the assumptions on which British and American ideas rested was pulled from thin air. The airmen’s expectations— and hence their arguments — revealed the way in which they interpreted the world around them and in which they sought to promote their own interests. ... Likewise, their failure to see the potential problems and flaws in these ideas— and the ramifications that might flow from them— reflected the cognitive shortcuts of seeing what we expect to see and what is in our interest to see.’<sup>31</sup>

### **The ethics of non-combatant immunity**

Other considerations of the strategic bombing campaign tend to take, literally, a different perspective. There are a number of accounts of the suffering inflicted by bombing campaigns which tend to reach a more definitive view of the conduct of the bombing campaign. Lowe concludes; ‘Perhaps the worst aspect of this policy is that it removed all the traditional distinctions between combatants and civilians. There has to be some line over which military men will not cross, even if it is an arbitrary one.’<sup>32</sup> Grayling conducts an extensive analysis of the RAF campaign throughout the Second World War, concluding;

‘Considered in hindsight, the degree of moral set-aside obvious here [the orders to the bomber crews attacking Dresden] in the idea of ‘hitting the enemy where he will feel it most’ – that is, a civilian population in an iconic city – and the calculation involved in using civilian lives and the precipitates of history to make a gesture in a game of diplomatic politics, is breathtaking.’<sup>33</sup>

Slim assesses the bombing campaign purely in ethical terms. He considers bombing in terms of Leiber’s Code (a 19<sup>th</sup> century code of moral conduct in war derived during the US Civil War). In describing what he sees as the paradox inherent in modern total war, Slim suggests that;

‘It claims that what we fight for is of such ultimate importance that we have to break some of our own rules to defend it. Indeed, the only way we will be in a position to reaffirm these laws and their moral norms in the future is by breaking them now. The end justifies exceptional means. The insight and appeal of this reasoning come from its ability to transform a contradiction into a paradox. ... Commitment to such an anti-civilian position by those who would normally prize the civilian ethic is made possible if one realises that this apparent inconsistency, this breach of values, is in fact a terrible

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p291

<sup>32</sup> LOWE, K. 2007. *Inferno: The Devastation of Hamburg 1943*. London: Penguin Group. (Kindle location 5169) and GREGG, V. 2013. *Dresden: A Survivor’s Story*. London: Bloomsbury Reader.

<sup>33</sup> GRAYLING, A. C. 2006. *Among the Dead Cities*, London, Bloomsbury. p260

but necessary means to secure these values. ...This paradox is deeply resonant in human moral reasoning.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, this paradox underlies much of the analysis of the strategic bombing campaign, and much of the subsequent analyses of nuclear deterrence. Biddle concludes that 'On 6 August, over Hiroshima, no moral threshold was crossed that had not been crossed much earlier in the year.'<sup>35</sup> There is kinship between the morality of the strategic bombing campaign of the Second World War and the morality of the use of nuclear weapons, and this has significant implications for subsequent thought about the morality of nuclear deterrence; but is the conditional intent to inflict non-combatant casualties morally equivalent to actually doing it? This thesis will not address that question, but will attempt to identify one aspect of Slim's paradox – the ethical aspects of the relationship between those who make decisions in this highly contested moral area, and the public they serve.

Bellamy considered much the same question and concluded that the UK government systematically misled the public, parliament and the Church.<sup>36</sup> He concludes that the British government was deliberately misleading and not simply mistaken in its own arguments. The Government was considering the ethics of area bombing in terms of Walzer's 'Supreme emergency'<sup>37</sup> and, Bellamy concludes;

'[British politicians] ... calculated that a significant portion of the British public would oppose the deliberate bombing of German non-combatants and believed that this could undermine domestic support for the war. In turn, this suggests that proponents of the idea of supreme emergency overestimate the extent to which liberal societies are prepared to accept the deliberate killing of non-combatants by their governments, and underestimate the normative force of non-combatant immunity.'<sup>38</sup>

This tension, and its effect on British government decision-making, is one of the factors that this thesis aims to consider.

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<sup>34</sup> SLIM, H. 2007. *Killing Civilians; Method, Madness and Morality in War*, London, Hurst. p152

<sup>35</sup> BIDDLE, T. D. 2002. Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing 1914-1945. P270

<sup>36</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2008. The Ethics of Terror Bombing: Beyond Supreme Emergency. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 7, 41-65. PP54-55

<sup>37</sup> Drawing on Churchill's consideration of the rights of neutrals at the start of Second World War, Walzer argued that 'In an emergency, neutral rights can be overridden, and when we override them we make no claim that they have been diminished, weakened, or lost. They have to be overridden ... precisely because they are still there, in full force, obstacles to some great (necessary) triumph for mankind.' WALZER, M. 1977b. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. P247

<sup>38</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2008. The Ethics of Terror Bombing: Beyond Supreme Emergency. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 7, 41-65. p58

## The political implications of nuclear strategy

Many of the core texts considering early nuclear deterrence theory have in themselves become primary sources. Kahn's 'On Thermonuclear War'<sup>39</sup> and 'Escalation and other Metaphors'<sup>40</sup> have been instrumental in informing two generations of nuclear strategy development, on both sides of the Atlantic; indeed, the term 'ladders of escalation' has become an oxymoron in strategic discourse, abused, misunderstood, and quoted repeatedly out of context. 'On Thermonuclear War' is the earliest consideration of the necessity to face the possibility of a nuclear war and the requirement to address the implications of Russian atomic parity in order that deterrence would be more credible, and therefore more effective. Implicit in Kahn's original argument was the idea '*si vis pacem, para bellum*' but in a far more literal sense than had ever before been articulated. These considered ideas challenged the Eisenhower Administration policy of massive retaliation, shocked the American establishment and significantly influenced Kennedy and Mcnamara in their redesign of the US nuclear strategy on taking office in 1960.<sup>41</sup>

Kahn, Bundy, Brodie, Schelling, Nye and Kaplan dominated the various schools of thought in the USA with respect to nuclear strategies during the late 1950s and 1960s, and their influence is still prevalent today in theories of nuclear deterrence. Their views tend to be couched in terms that assume that an inherent aspect of nuclear deterrence is being prepared to fight a nuclear war, and therefore they have a 'warlike' feel which is less evident in today's strategists. Following Kahn, they couched the key tenets of nuclear deterrence in language that would be anathema to a modern politician, but regardless, it remains the key tenet: 'Nuclear weapons make it possible to do monstrous violence to the enemy without first achieving victory'<sup>42</sup> with Kaplan advocating '...the threat of counterattack is the best strategy against the possibility of aggression.'<sup>43</sup> Kaplan also coined the phrase 'wargaming', soon to become common currency with Kennedy's advisors. Schelling, as well as developing the concept of nuclear wargames through the 1960s, also advocated strongly that dialogue is a critical element of deterrence, even in the sense of prescribing responses;

'Words, apparently, do contribute ... verbal activity can call attention to distinctions that might not have been recognized ... Secretary

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<sup>39</sup> KAHN, H. 1961. *On Thermonuclear War*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

<sup>40</sup> KAHN, H. 1969. *On Escalation; Metaphors and Scenarios*, New York, Frederic A Praeger.

<sup>41</sup> SCHLOSSER, E. 2014. *Command and Control*. Kindle ed. London: Penguin. P281

<sup>42</sup> SCHELLING, T. C. 2008. *Arms and Influence*. Kindle 2008 ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Kindle Location 461-463

<sup>43</sup> KAPLAN, M. A. 1958. The Calculus of Nuclear Deterrence. *World Politics*, 11, 20-43.

McNamara's proposal that cities be off limits is one that, though its expression does not create the difference between cities and military establishment, can at least call attention to a potential dividing line ...<sup>44</sup>

The evolution of massive retaliation, flexible response, and their associated countervalue and counterforce targeting can be followed through the writings of these 'Wizards of Armageddon'.<sup>45</sup> Bundy, (National Security Advisor to Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962), continued thinking and publishing on nuclear policy and strategy, developing his thinking, along with many of his peers; 'The time has come for careful study of the ways and means of moving to a new Alliance policy and doctrine; that nuclear weapons will not be used unless an aggressor should use them first.'<sup>46</sup>

In the UK, contemporary analysis of nuclear strategy was less common, although Lawrence Freedman provided an almost perpetual public narrative and analysis throughout the Cold War. Starting from a focus on military strategy and how it relates to policy and to the actual conduct of warfare,<sup>47</sup> Freedman's thinking evolved at least in time with, if not ahead of, the major shifts in US and NATO deterrence strategy; he was instrumental in the conscious linkage of deterrence with arms control<sup>48</sup> and his influence can be traced through his collaboration with the American strategists over 40 years. It would be ludicrous to attempt to quantify the contribution made by Freedman to the study of nuclear strategy, but this thesis will try to consider the impact his work had on the key British policy decisions as they were taken. His work ranged from direct strategic analysis of contemporary issues,<sup>49</sup> often conducted in conjunction with American strategists, to transformative ethical considerations of nuclear strategy which consider the very clear moral dilemmas associated with nuclear deterrence especially countervalue targeting (attacks on cities as a deterrence tool) against an informed understanding of deterrence and warfighting strategies in the Cold War.<sup>50</sup> Finally, Freedman's canon

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<sup>44</sup> SCHELLING, T. C. 2008. *Arms and Influence*. Kindle 2008 ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

<sup>45</sup> KAPLAN, F. 1991. *The Wizards of Armageddon*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.

<sup>46</sup> BUNDY, M., KENNAN, G., MCNAMARA, R. & SMITH, G. 1982. Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance. *Foreign Affairs*, 60.

<sup>47</sup> FREEDMAN, L. 1980. *Britain and nuclear weapons*, London, Macmillan.

<sup>48</sup> FREEDMAN, L. 1981b. *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, New York, St Martin's Press.

<sup>49</sup> FREEDMAN, L. 1981c. NATO Myths. *Foreign Policy*, 48-68.

<sup>50</sup> HARDIN, R. & FREEDMAN, L. 1985. *Nuclear deterrence : ethics and strategy*, Chicago ; London, University of Chicago Press, FREEDMAN, L. 1981a. Britain: The First Ex-Nuclear Power? *International Security*, 6, 80-104. Clearly this is something which continued to agitate Freedman after the end of the Cold War as a series of retrospective analyses represents continued thinking; SHUE, H. & FREEDMAN, L. 1989. *Nuclear deterrence and moral restraint : critical choices for American strategy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

of work on deterrence includes, for this author, unparalleled objective analyses of the development of (western) nuclear strategy since 1945 and a unique perspective on the development of British policy and strategy over that period.<sup>51</sup> This degree of objectivity is rare amongst commentaries on nuclear deterrence issues which are as often clouded by polemic as not.

(Lord) Zuckerman, Chief Scientific Adviser to the MOD between 1960 and 1968, and latterly a special adviser to Foreign Secretary David Owen in the 1970s, was given exceptional permission to publish an article in 1961 on 'Judgement and Control in Modern Warfare'.<sup>52</sup> The article prompted questions in the House of Commons, with Prime Minister Mr Macmillan describing the article as a contribution to an ongoing discussion between highly placed officers, which he felt it would be of value to publish. Once retired in 1968, Zuckerman published a book considering the impact of science on military and civil affairs, of which one chapter rehearsed the key elements of his 1961 article:

'Far from an all-out nuclear exchange being a rational action which could ever be justified by any set of conceivable political gains, it is highly unlikely that any country would in the pursuit of its political objectives, deliberately risk the destruction of its own capital city, leave alone the destruction of all its major centres of population; or risk the resultant chaos which would leave in doubt a government's ability to remain in control of its people.'<sup>53</sup>

Stocker and Stoddart could be described as Freedman's successors, with Stocker considering the decisions about the future of the British nuclear deterrent taken in the early 2000s in a grand strategic context in the manner of Freedman;

'Integration of defences (denial) into a deterrence posture offers several advantages, especially in circumstances where traditional deterrence (punishment) may be weak. By providing an alternative to automatic retaliation, defences could raise the nuclear threshold. Where an opponent may have cause (rightly or wrongly) to doubt one's determination to retaliate, an ability to defeat a limited missile attack provides a second rationale for not mounting one. And given Western reluctance to countenance large-scale civilian casualties (as well as enemy casualties), the ability to defeat rather than to avenge an attack has obvious attractions.'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> FREEDMAN, L. 2004. *Deterrence*, Cambridge, Polity Press, FREEDMAN, L. 1980. *Britain and nuclear weapons*, London, Macmillan.

<sup>52</sup> ZUCKERMAN, S. 1962. Judgement and Control in Modern Warfare. *Foreign Affairs*, 40, 196-212.

<sup>53</sup> ZUCKERMAN, S. 1966. *Scientists and War; The Impact of Science on Military and Civil Affairs*, London, Hamish Hamilton. P64

<sup>54</sup> STOCKER, J. 2007. The United Kingdom and Nuclear Deterrence. *Adelphi Papers*. P58

Stoddart provides a clear narrative of the process of British nuclear policy decision-making between the early 1960s and the decision to procure Trident. With stoic objectivity, Stoddart allows an exquisite array of primary sources to imply many of the strategic aspects and implications of those decisions, and highlights in detail the degree of internal debate that informed each government decision:

‘On seeing the first two parts of the Duff-Mason Report on 11 December 1978, David Owen concurred that the ‘theoretical and practical aspects of the problem can[not] be considered in isolation from one another.’ He felt that they concentrated too heavily on strategic systems without ever deconstructing what the term ‘strategic’ implied.’<sup>55</sup>

Similar reflections on the evolution of nuclear strategy and the broader mechanics of Cold War British government are provided by Peter Hennesy’s wide-ranging studies. Hennesy’s personal relationships with government ministers since Wilson’s time have allowed him to describe strategic decisions in the context both of the Cold War as it happened, and also contemporary British social history.<sup>56</sup> He quotes Lord Allen, the Home Office representative on the Strath Committee;

“I can remember sitting on a committee working out the horrors of the H-Bomb as distinct from the much more modest A-Bomb. And, although it seemed like Never-Never Land at the time, we did work out these theoretical methods of keeping on the government – setting up organizations. One had a feeling that, if it came to it, nothing would quite work out the way one was planning. But, nevertheless, one simply had to plan.”<sup>57</sup>

It is almost impossible to view nuclear deterrence from an entirely objective position; nuclear deterrence is almost the modern litmus test of Carr’s realism v idealism.<sup>58</sup> Surely nobody rational could argue that nuclear war could be anything but a catastrophe. The difference in opinion between those who support nuclear deterrence and those who would abolish nuclear weapons is simply one of understanding how best to avoid nuclear war.

Michael Quinlan sat at the heart of British government strategic evolution during the 1980s and 1990s and, unusually, wrote extensively on nuclear deterrence. Within the MOD today he is regarded as the ‘high priest’ of British nuclear deterrence

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<sup>55</sup> STODDART, K. 2014a. *Facing Down the Soviet Union; Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons 1976-1983*, Palgrave Macmillan. P59

<sup>56</sup> HENNESSY, P. 1996. *Muddling Through; Power, Politics and the quality of Government in Postwar Britain*, Oxford, Indigo. HENNESSY, P. 2006. *Having It So Good; Britain in the Fifties*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

<sup>57</sup> HENNESSY, P. 2010. *The Secret State*, London, Penguin Books Ltd. P155

<sup>58</sup> CARR, E. H. 1962. *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939; An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, London, Macmillan and Co.

strategy, although he tends to be selectively quoted to make political capital, rather than with any deep understanding of the moral issues associated with nuclear deterrence that he explored from the standpoint of a practicing Roman Catholic. Quinlan's personal views were published after his retirement,<sup>59</sup> and his prolific letters were collected and published after his death.<sup>60</sup> During his tenure at the MOD, he was substantially responsible for the 1980 Defence Open Government Document describing the decision to replace Polaris with Trident, and almost uniquely for an official, he was given permission to correspond in public as long as he; '... avoid any suggestion either that what you are now writing is ministerially approved or that there is a difference between what you say with ministerial approval and what you say on a personal basis...' <sup>61</sup> of which more at Chapter 6 below.

Those who tend to see the world in realist terms tend to consider the hard power implications of international relations in their contemporary context, and consider that as long as nuclear weapons exist, deterrence is the best way of preventing their use, and also to deter a modern conventional great power war. Those who believe that the world is more a norms and international rules-based environment tend to advocate for disarmament as the best way of avoiding nuclear war.

Over 30 years of analysis, Gray derives conclusions typical of such a realist interpretation;

'It so happens that although we know nothing in detail about warfare in the 2020s or 2050s, we do know an enormous amount about war and warfare *per se* ... it is improbable that there will be a traumatic breakpoint in history's continuities, including the continuity of its discontinuities, in the near future'<sup>62</sup>

and he continues; 'But a policy that amounts to an investment of hope either that humankind has forsworn most forms of warfare, or, more likely, that someone else will be called upon to bear the security burden, is in danger of functioning as a self-denying delusion.'<sup>63</sup> That said, his view during the height of the Cold War was stoically fatalist:

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<sup>59</sup> QUINLAN, M. 2009. *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons; Principles, Problems, Prospects*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, QUINLAN, M. 1997. *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons. The RUSI Journal*, 142, 1. QUINLAN, M. 2009. *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons; Principles, Problems, Prospects*, Oxford, Oxford University Press,

<sup>60</sup> OGILVIE-WHITE, T. 2011. *On Nuclear Deterrence: The Correspondence of Sir Michael Quinlan*, London, Routledge.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Arthur Hockaday (2nd PUS at MOD) to Quinlan, 7 August 1981. Quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>62</sup> GRAY, C. S. 2005. *Another Bloody Century*, London, Orion. Pp14-15

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*. p34



'The issue is not whether or not a nuclear war could be fought and won... Rather, it is whether defense planners have any prudent option other than to try...' and he concluded; 'To say that our strategy is deterrence is inadmissible - because no one ... can guarantee that deterrence will always work, or will even always be relevant..'<sup>64</sup>

This rather bleak assessment is almost the starting point for the 'idealist' counterpoint.

### **Contemporary morality**

This section will introduce the key texts in this area; chapter 7 will consider contemporary ethical issues more closely. The neatest paradigm in which to consider the use of force generally, and therefore nuclear deterrence is the Just War tradition. This has four main strands in the modern western world; there is a pure ethics paradigm derived from deep analysis of rights theories, which extrapolates those individual human rights into the terminology of the Just War lexicon, typified currently by David Rodin and Jeff McMahan. Between them they make more or less compelling arguments that in terms of individual human rights most forms of war, and many of the assumptions of the Just War tradition, are simply not morally acceptable.<sup>65</sup>

This view has been described as functional pacifism<sup>66</sup> by James Turner Johnson who tends to situate Just War thinking in the politics of its day; he could be taken to represent the classical 'Just War' tradition paradigm and many who consider current conflict from within the Just War lexicon would be in this camp.<sup>67</sup> There is another sophisticated position that straddles these two camps, describing the tension between the two and suggesting that it is this ethical tension that is important; the dialogue and process of argument tends to keep wars moral, more or less, and this

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<sup>64</sup> GRAY, C. S. & HOWARD, M. 1981. Perspectives on Fighting Nuclear War. *International Security*, 6, 185-187.

<sup>65</sup> RODIN, D. 2002. *War and Self-Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. RODIN, D. 2011. Justifying Harm. *Ethics*, 122, 74-110. MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. MCMAHAN, J. 1989. Is Nuclear Deterrence Paradoxical? *Ethics*, 99, 407-422, MCMAHAN, J. 1985. Deterrence and Deontology. *Ethics*, 95, 517-536.

<sup>66</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 2009. Thinking Historically about Just War. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 8, 246-259. P254

<sup>67</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 2011. *Ethics and Use of Force; Just War in Historical Perspective*, London, Ashgate, JOHNSON, J. T. 2008. The Idea of Defense in Historical and Contemporary Thinking about Just War. *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 36, 543-556, JOHNSON, J. T. 1999. *Morality and Contemporary Warfare*, New Haven, Yale University Press, JOHNSON, J. T. 1984. *Can Modern War be Just?*, New Haven USA, Yale University Press.

is typified by Alex Bellamy,<sup>68</sup> arguably presaged by Childress<sup>69</sup>. Finally, there is the realist view of Morgenthau, Mearsheimer and, to a lesser extent, Haslam. This tends to be based on the utilitarian school of moral thinking; ‘... to choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment. In the combination of political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny.’<sup>70</sup>

As before, this Realist view ‘feels’ bleak;

‘the problem with British thinkers, according to Carr, was not just that they ignored power, but that they were utopians as well. He thought they held a hopelessly idealistic view of international politics. In particular, they had a normative agenda which led them to pay little attention to the world around them and to focus instead on changing how states relate to each other.’<sup>71</sup>

None of these ideas of war and its linkage to morals are new; modern philosophy examines the same ideas in new ways. Walzer’s seminal ‘Just and Unjust Wars’ highlights, if not actually sets, most of the parameters of the contemporary debate;

‘A just war is one that it is morally urgent to win, and a soldier who dies in a just war does not die in vain. Critical values are at stake: political independence, communal liberty, human life. Other means failing (an important qualification), wars to defend these values are justified.’<sup>72</sup>

This does not sit well with Rodin’s view; ‘It seems to me that it would also be disproportionate to use lethal force against someone who sought to deprive you of important political freedoms such as the right to vote or freely express your opinions.’<sup>73</sup> Neither view was prevalent when most of the decisions and discussions under consideration were being made – they are, however, relevant now and will be considered in detail below.

‘Thus there have been roughly two main types of ethical doctrine – those that are concerned primarily with the rightness of an act and those that are chiefly

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<sup>68</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2009. When is it Right to Fight? International Law and Jus ad Bellum. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 8, 231-245, BELLAMY, A. 2006. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq*, London, Blackwell.

<sup>69</sup> CHILDRESS, J. F. 1987. Can Modern War be Just. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 55, 604. CHILDRESS, J. F. 1978b. Just War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities and Functions of their Criteria. *Theological Studies*, 39, 427-445. CHILDRESS, J. F. 1978a. Just and Unjust War : review. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

<sup>70</sup> MORGENTHAU, H. J. 1945. The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil. *Ethics*, 56, 1-18, *ibid.* p18

<sup>71</sup> MEARSHEIMER, J. 2005. E H CARR vs Idealism: The Battle Rages On. *International Relations*, 19, 139-152. p140

<sup>72</sup> WALZER, M. 1977b. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. p110

<sup>73</sup> RODIN, D. 2002. *War and Self-Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P48

concerned about the motive from which it is performed.<sup>74</sup> Browne's 1945 article asks the same questions modern ethicists seek to answer; in essence the issues have not changed since St Augustine. 'We have created a Star Wars civilization, with Stone Age emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology.'<sup>75</sup>

Commenting on the Yugoslav civil war and the NATO air campaign against Serbia, Coker observed;

'For the moment, the West is still in the war business but it is attempting to to change its nature by fighting wars more humanely ... They are intent on sanitising war, on purging it of those elements which, though once familiar and accepted without question, now cast it in a light that is offensive to the liberal conscience.'<sup>76</sup>

Whilst this may have appeared to have been borne out by the conduct of that conflict, and subsequent Western interventions, it does tend to consider only discretionary conflicts to support his case; 'Today our citizens have been demobilised; they are no longer required to serve in the military or to endure the passive stoicism in the face of great danger which was expected for their forefathers for much of the last century.'<sup>77</sup> But if the state is fighting for its very survival, especially against a nuclear-armed adversary, there is nothing to suggest that war will be anything but hell, with all attendant miseries; indeed, 'passive stoicism in the face of great danger' could be interpreted as the very definition of life under the nuclear shadow.

### **Nuclear culture**

Groom<sup>78</sup> and Stoddart and Baylis<sup>79</sup> provide detailed analyses of many of the factors considered by government in the formulation of nuclear deterrence policy, and these tend to highlight the apparent inconsistencies between policy decisions and prevailing economic or strategic circumstances, but they do not consider the engagement with the public in any detail, although they do identify key aspects of that engagement;

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<sup>74</sup> BROWNE, S. S. S. 1945. Right Acts and Moral Actions. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 42, 505-515. P505

<sup>75</sup> WILSON, E. O. 2012. *The Social Conquest of Earth*. Kindle ed. London: WW Norton Kindle. (Kindle location 179)

<sup>76</sup> COKER, C. 2001. *Humane Warfare*, London, Routledge. P3

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p5

<sup>78</sup> GROOM, A. 1974. *British Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*, London, Frances Pinter.

<sup>79</sup> BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2012b. The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Ideas and Beliefs (Part One). *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23, 331-346. BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2012a. The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Beliefs, Culture, and Status (Part Two). *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23, 493-516. BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2014. *The British Nuclear Experience: The Roles of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford, OUP.

‘Hydrogen bombs and missiles brought the threat of a nuclear war to the forefront of public consciousness. Perception of a Soviet threat had, in general terms, underlaid the intellectual debate ...’<sup>80</sup>

Baylis and Stoddart suggest that;

‘The British nuclear experience suggests that ideational, more than materialist, factors have been at the heart of British nuclear policy and that, in particular, the ideas and beliefs of a relatively small political, military, and scientific elite have been of critical importance in the continuing British view in the important utility of nuclear weapons.’<sup>81</sup>

They argue that there are a number of essential characteristics of this nuclear belief system including; the Battle of Britain mindset (a final guarantee of state integrity); the maintenance of Britain’s status in the front rank of powers as other states developed nuclear weapons and; the ability to influence US foreign and defence policy.<sup>82</sup> They conclude that the role of nuclear weapons and British thinking about them have changed over time, and that the;

“‘realist school of thought’ produced the ideational context in which the nuclear belief system in Britain became—and has remained—so influential, initially amongst a strategic elite who shared ‘a deterrence frame of mind’ and subsequently more widely amongst the British population as a whole.’<sup>83</sup>

This view of the shared nuclear culture is by no means common to all analyses. There is often a clear division made between the ‘official’ nuclear culture and the more generic experience of the population at large. Laucht defined British nuclear culture as; ‘the sum of all experiences with regard to civilian and military uses of atomic energy, including such diverse layers as science and technology (both theoretical and applied), society, culture, politics, identity, gender, race, ethnicity and class.’<sup>84</sup> He concentrated on the ‘the practice of nuclear science and the social, political and cultural implications of the atomic scientists’ work.’ Hogg, in his detailed record and analysis of British nuclear cultural history argues that;

‘The secret-then-public trajectory of nuclear development in Britain meant that the government needed to devise ways of articulating the necessity of a nuclear deterrent to the nation and the benefits of

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<sup>80</sup> GROOM, A. 1974. *British Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*, London, Frances Pinter. P117

<sup>81</sup> BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2012b. The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Ideas and Beliefs (Part One). *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23, 331-346. P331

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. pp343-344

<sup>83</sup> BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2012a. The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Beliefs, Culture, and Status (Part Two). *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23, 493-516.

<sup>84</sup> LAUCHT, C. 2012. *Elemental Germans: Klaus Fuchs, Rudolf Peierls and the Making of British Nuclear Culture 1939-59*, Palgrave Macmillan UK. P5

nuclear technology for peaceful uses. This articulation took the form of an official narrative that encapsulated complex themes of national identity, prestige, duty, technological superiority and paternal responsibility.<sup>85</sup>

Although Hogg is meticulous in his treatment of popular culture, he treats government policy as oddly monolithic and presents little consideration of the now commonly acknowledged arguments within Cabinet and Parliament on almost every aspect of the national nuclear deterrent.

Of particular relevance to this thesis, Hogg does not consider why there is such an apparent disconnect between popular nuclear culture, as he depicts it, and government and why there is so little interaction between governments and the public on this matter, although, referring to two television productions,<sup>86</sup> he is caustic about the effect:

‘Overall, the broadcast of *Threads* and *The War Game* marked a significant moment in British cultural history. These two films cut to the heart of debates over nuclear armament and civil defence in their realistic depictions of the hellish aftermath of nuclear war.’<sup>87</sup>

Review of the literature (of which there is a great deal with only an indicative selection considered above) suggests that a number of factors have affected the development of the UK nuclear deterrence policy. These include; the perceived strategic imperatives of the period, determined by the political conditions during the Cold War and technological and military factors; industrial capacity, both retention of the ability to manufacture high technology defence products such as nuclear weapons and submarines, and the limitations that the UK industrial base set upon that endeavor; demanding ethical issues in which evolving destructive capabilities were stretching and forcing rapid assessment of commonly understood ethical precepts and; the means of public engagement through media and press. This thesis will consider these issues in the context of the time, and will not seek to judge actions and decisions in relation to modern criteria, but to try to understand what were the salient factors in the decision-making process at that time.

To that end, the inherited beliefs and experience of the key protagonists are likely to be significant and the scope of this thesis will encompass these by analyzing the

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<sup>85</sup> HOGG, J. 2016. *British Nuclear Culture; Official and Unofficial Narratives in the Long 20th Century*. London: Bloomsbury. (Kindle Locations 1744-1747)

<sup>86</sup> ‘*Threads*’ was a TV movie depicting a nuclear attack on Sheffield in 1982, in the style of disaster movies of the era. *The War Game* was a 1965 BBC documentary but not screened on television until 1985

<sup>87</sup> HOGG, J. 2016. *British Nuclear Culture; Official and Unofficial Narratives in the Long 20th Century*. London: Bloomsbury. (Kindle Locations 3339-3356).

decision making associated with strategic bombing as it developed in the First and Second World Wars. This is the most demanding aspect of this study, drawing on poorly documented decisions from the 'silence of men's minds' as Hastings so eloquently put it.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> HASTINGS, M. 2010. *Bomber Command*, Basingstoke and Oxford, Pan. P113

## **Chapter Four: What factors affected development of UK strategic bombing policy during the Second World War?**

‘... a nation that finds itself on the brink of an abyss will try to save itself by any means.’<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Baylis and Stoddart conclude that there is a distinctly British nuclear deterrence belief system based on an evolving ‘deterrence habit of mind’.<sup>2</sup> The assumption that personal views and experience are influential factors that influence key decision-makers’ thinking is a fundamental element of the research for this thesis. However, it extends that hypothesis historically to consider what effect the experience of the Second World War, and the factors that shaped that conflict, had on those making nuclear deterrence policy in the early 1950s. In particular, in the context of the evolution of air warfare, it focuses on the evolution of the interaction between government and the public on the conduct of, and planning for, the strategic bombing campaign.

Atomic weapons did not engender a sudden discussion about the vulnerability of non-combatants in modern war. By the time of the Hiroshima bomb, the world had become sadly familiar with the results of the bombing of cities. Aerial bombardment had been a source of ethical debate drawing an odd blend of public pugnacity, political timidity, and distaste in Britain since the First World War. The very tenor of both strategic thinking and the laws of war were challenged by the experiences of the Great War and its emerging technologies, threatening non-combatants in a way inconceivable to earlier strategists and ethicists. These technologies were refined between the wars and there is an almost teleological inevitability about the fate of Hiroshima. There is a growing body of study into the decisions which led to the conduct of the ‘area’ bombing of German cities by aircraft of the Royal Air Force between 1943 and 1945, much of which focuses specifically on the legitimacy of the campaign.

This chapter will investigate the context in which the decisions that led to the British bombing campaign against Germany in 1943-1945 were made, not the legitimacy of the campaign *per se*. It will address the evolution of the technical, operational,

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<sup>1</sup> CLAUSEWITZ, C. V. 2008. On War. In: HOWARD, M. & PARET, P. (eds.) Kindle ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p483

<sup>2</sup> BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2014. *The British Nuclear Experience: The Roles of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford, OUP. P18 and Ch 11 ‘Conclusions’

doctrinal, political and cultural factors that combined to influence those decisions, identify the most salient factors, and examine how those decisions and factors were presented to the public.

Initial examination of these factors which influenced decisions made about strategic bombing during the Second World War suggests that many had their roots in the earliest experiences of aerial bombardment during the First World War. The reactions of British politicians, military planners and the public to the bombing of civilians by German aircraft during the First World War created precedents for much of the debate to follow in the 1940s. This chapter will demonstrate that this interplay of factors significantly affected the development of UK strategy and air power capability in the inter-war years into the Second World War, and by extension, British thinking on the strategic potential and ethical impact of atomic weapons.

### **The First World War**

British politicians and newspapers had responded to Zeppelin attacks on London in the autumn of 1915 with relative restraint; one headline read; 'Zeppelin Raid on London; Eight persons killed and over thirty injured.'<sup>3</sup> The general theme of the public and press reaction was one of regretful bemusement at this apparent breach of the rules of 'civilised warfare'. The Guardian, quoting an American interview with a German airship commander who asserted that he felt deeply when '... he learns that women and children and other non-combatants are killed' concluded that;

'...one of the blackest of the many crimes with which Germany has stained herself during this past year is that she has introduced this inevitably haphazard murder into warfare. Commander Mathy ... contents himself with treating the slaughter of women and children as an unfortunate and deplorable accident. But those who sent him know that it is not an accident, and they do not deplore it.'<sup>4</sup>

A number of debates were held in the Commons over the precautions being taken against German air raids, but the government consistently refused to discuss details of capabilities, tactics or policy on the grounds such as; 'Information as to the numbers, disposition, and efficiency of the guns available for anti-aircraft defence would be exceedingly valuable to the enemy, and cannot therefore be made public.'<sup>5</sup> In what was to become characteristic of discussion of strategic bombing, the first government response was to plead secrecy.

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<sup>3</sup> GUARDIAN. Zeppelin Raid on London. 14 Oct 1915, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> GUARDIAN. Zeppelin Commander on his Task. 25 Sep 1915, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> MACPHERSON, J. HC Deb 07 June 1917. Hansard vol 94 cc353W.



Preston provides a blow by blow account of the Zeppelin campaign; after a six week campaign including 26 raids against the Capital, but with increasing fatality rates amongst the airship crews, the Zeppelin raids were stopped; 550 civilians had been killed and more than 1300 injured.<sup>6</sup>

On the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> March 1917, the hospital ship 'Asturias' was torpedoed off Devon by the submarine UC-66 with the loss of 35 lives. This was the latest in a series of attacks on British hospital ships over the winter of 1917. Since it was almost impossible to defend the ships, the Imperial War Cabinet established a Committee under Lord Curzon to investigate options, including aerial bombardment of German towns in retaliation. Cabinet discussed the issue of reprisals<sup>7</sup> on 3<sup>rd</sup> April but deferred decision on this difficult issue until more definitive information about the attacks was known.<sup>8</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> April they agreed;

'... that the only practicable form of reprisals ... was the aerial bombardment of an open German town ... though most reluctant to embark upon a policy which might involve the killing of women and children, were agreed that there was no other alternative.'<sup>9</sup>

In Parliament, the issue was more black and white; reprisals for attacks on hospital ships and aerial bombardment of towns were either expedient or abhorrent. Sir John Lonsdale demanded '... what steps are to be taken to give effect to the threat of reprisals against Germany for torpedoing hospital ships?'<sup>10</sup> Throughout the summer, Mr Pemberton Billing argued vehemently for reprisals against the renewed air raids; 'There is only one way by which we shall be able to stop air raids of heavier-than-air machines; that is by reprisals. Whether this country likes reprisals or not bothers me very little.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly, there were those such as Mr Molteno who were equally opposed:

'... does the War Cabinet think that it would be in accordance with the high principles of humanity if fighting men are withdrawn from

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<sup>6</sup> PRESTON, D. 2015. *A Higher Form of Killing: Six Weeks in World War One that Forever Changed the Nature of Warfare*. London and New York: Bloomsbury. Kindle Location 4215

<sup>7</sup> International Humanitarian Law defines reprisals as: 'A belligerent reprisal consists of an action that would otherwise be unlawful but that in exceptional cases is considered lawful under international law when used as an enforcement measure in reaction to unlawful acts of an adversary. In international humanitarian law there is a trend to outlaw belligerent reprisals altogether.' INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT. 2016. *International Humanitarian Law Rule 145: Reprisals* [Online]. Available: [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/print/v1\\_rul\\_rule145](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/print/v1_rul_rule145) [Accessed 13 September 2016].

<sup>8</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet 3 April 1917. TNA CAB 23/40/07.

<sup>9</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet 12 April 1917. TNA CAB 23/40/09.

<sup>10</sup> HC Debate 19 April 1917. HANSARD vol 92 c1815.

<sup>11</sup> HC Debate 25 June 1917. HANSARD vol 95 cc14-5 14.

fighting the armed forces of the enemy to attack the civil population?’<sup>12</sup>

Eight bomber aircraft of No 2 Squadron of the Royal Naval Air Service attacked the German town of Freiburg on the morning of 14<sup>th</sup> April dropping about thirty 65lb bombs and leaflets explaining why the town was being attacked. Another attack was made that afternoon.<sup>13</sup> The newspapers reported the attack specifically as a reprisal, the Guardian headline reading; ‘Hospital Ship Crimes; Naval Airmen Bomb German Town.’<sup>14</sup> There was no comment on the British adoption of the same ‘form of ‘haphazard murder’’ deplored by the Guardian in 1915. After this attack on Freiburg, the War Cabinet seems to have been reluctant to order further reprisals although German submarines continued to attack hospital ships and there was a steady increase in German bombing of the UK.

The first German ‘Gotha’ aircraft bombing attacks on Dover and Folkestone in May 1917 drew an emotive press response; ‘Shrapnel for Women and Children.’<sup>15</sup> The editorial continued; ‘If we thought that reprisals on undefended towns would be effectual in stopping German raids on our own, we might, for the sake of saving life, have to waste it, repulsive as the necessity might be.’<sup>16</sup> A subsequent attack on London on 13 June hit a school, killing 18 children. The debate in the Commons the next day contained no rhetoric, nor debate about retaliatory attacks; it concentrated on the defences for London (which the government still refused to describe) ‘... I am sure that neither my hon. Friend nor the House will expect us to say what we are endeavouring to do’<sup>17</sup> and on the matter of air raid warnings; ‘... I am informed that yesterday people in the West End actually took taxis to go down to see the raid when they heard that it was taking place.’<sup>18</sup> The Cabinet noted that ‘out of all the casualties caused by the raid there was not the name of a single soldier.’<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the famously succinct Cabinet minutes seldom indicate the full flavour of the discussions, in this case the note that only non-combatants were killed would suggest that the issue of the targeting of non-combatants was significant in the Cabinet’s discussion. Cabinet agreed to discuss; ‘...reprisals for air raids, with a view to the investigation more particularly of the effect which the adoption of a policy

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<sup>12</sup> HC Debate 24 April 1917. HANSARD vol 92 cc2224-5.

<sup>13</sup> PEARSON, R. 2013. *More Than Would Be Reasonably Anticipated: No 3 Wing Royal Naval Air Service* [Online]. Dallas. Available: <http://www.overthefront.com/over-the-front-journal/sample-articles/more-than-would-be-reasonably-anticipated> [Accessed 15 Dec 2013].

<sup>14</sup> GUARDIAN. Hospital Ship Crimes; Naval Airmen Bomb German Town. 17 Apr 1917, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> GUARDIAN. Shrapnel for Women and Children. 28 May 1917, p.5.

<sup>16</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 1973. Toward Reconstructing the Jus Ad Bellum. *The Monist*, 57. P4

<sup>17</sup> BONAR LAW HC Deb 14 June 1917. Hansard vol 94 cc1136.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet 14 June 1917. TNA CAB 23-4-10.

of reprisals would have on the aerial operations on the Western Front.<sup>20</sup> The press reporting was becoming more critical, both of the German action and the British response. The Guardian headline read: 'Many Bombs in East End; School Hit. Ten Children Killed'.<sup>21</sup> The Times editorial demanded more defences for London saying; 'We have constantly pointed out that aeroplane raids of this character will become larger and more frequent ... We may be sure that such raids will be repeated, and that the attacking squadrons will grow in numbers.'<sup>22</sup>

The Guardian editorial also demanded better defences but concluded;

'It may be taken for granted that the Germans will repeat yesterday's raid on London, if possible with exaggeration of its horrors, as often as they dare ... It is wasting time at this stage to discuss the morality of the performance, for moral considerations are expressly ruled out of account in the calculations of the German General Staff.'<sup>23</sup>

These appear to be early steps in a trend of the assumption of the moral vacuity of hostile nations by the British press. There were, however, more radical recriminations with some public meetings demanding reprisals; the Times reported that a resolution calling for air reprisals was passed 'amid great cheering'<sup>24</sup> at one such meeting at the London Opera attended by thousands.

The German air raids continued, with dissent growing over the apparent impunity of the attackers. In late June the Cabinet Secretary received what appear to be coordinated appeals from meetings of residents' groups calling;

'...on the Government to initiate immediately a policy of ceaseless air attacks on German towns and cities, in order that their populations may experience the effect of their own methods of warfare, and thus are induced to force the German authorities to cease this wanton destruction of life and property.'<sup>25</sup>

Twenty-six civilians were killed on the morning of 7<sup>th</sup> July and that afternoon Cabinet decided that;

'...immediate steps must be taken to prevent a recurrence of these raids. Two methods of dealing with this question were discussed

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> GUARDIAN. Aeroplane Raid on London. 14 Jun 1917. p5

<sup>22</sup> TIMES. The Air Attack on London., 14 June 1917, p.7 col B.

<sup>23</sup> GUARDIAN. Aeroplane Raid on London. 14 Jun 1917.p4

<sup>24</sup> MESSER, R. L. 2005. Accidental Judgements, Casual Slaughters. In: CHICKERING, R. & FORSTER, S. (eds.) *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>25</sup> CABINET OFFICE Letter from Mr A Baker (Hertford) to Sec War Cabinet with resolution of a mtg held in Hertford on 26 Jun. TNA CAB 24/17/75. CABINET OFFICE Letter from Mr GJ Allen (Croydon) to Sec War Cabinet with resolution of a mtg held in Croydon (GT-1373 dated 26 Jun 1917). TNA CAB 24/17/74. CABINET OFFICE Letter from Dr Macnamara MP; Petition on Reprisals from constituents of Camberwell 9 Jul 17. TNA CAB 24/17/76.

namely:— (1.) The maintenance of an efficient force of machines in England with which to repel attacks. [and] (2.) Counter-attacks to be made on German towns, such as Mannheim.<sup>26</sup>

Two squadrons of aircraft were withdrawn from the 'front' and deployed to enhance the defences of South East England. No reprisal action was ordered.

Cabinet was dealing with a complex problem. There was a clear imperative to do something, but defences were ineffective and there was clearly a desire not to retaliate against non-combatants. The majority of the Cabinet were also of the opinion that reprisals should only be conducted if air superiority could be maintained at the Front, and an effective defence could be mounted for London. The decision to order reprisals depended on interrelated factors, not least of which was the element of last resort; there seemed to be no way to defend hospital ships or to defend against night attacks by bombers. The other considerations included an appreciation of the military effect (would reprisals actually deter further attacks?), the British capability (would the British air forces be able to mount such attacks and continue to meet their other commitments?), the effect on morale of the British public, and; the moral issue of attacking non-combatants.

The government found itself in the unenviable position of facing strenuous opposition whatever it decided. Only the government had to deal with the reality of all of the factors – those opposed to reprisal attacks on non-combatants voiced highly emotive deontological positions such as 'Does the government think that, if we send aeroplanes to kill little innocent German babies, that is going to help the situation?'<sup>27</sup> without concern for military realities. However, the majority of MPs and press coverage reflected more populist demands for retaliation, without worrying about ethical hazards. This dual pressure does appear to have affected government decisions, albeit in a rather haphazard manner. The usual answer to Parliamentary questions was to plead security and to refuse to discuss the issue,<sup>28</sup> and on the occasions when public engagement was inevitable, the government approach seems to have been apologetic; in approving the Freiburg attack, the Cabinet decided that;

'This measure of reprisal should be followed by a carefully prepared statement of justification by the Admiralty, explaining that no further

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<sup>26</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet 7 July 1917. TNA CAB 23/3/26.

<sup>27</sup> Sir S Collins MP: HC Debate 18 June 1917. HANSARD vol 94 cc1419-21. Col 1420

<sup>28</sup> BONAR LAW HC Deb 14 June 1917. Hansard vol 94 cc1136.

reprisals would be taken as soon as the Germans ceased their attacks upon our hospital ships.<sup>29</sup>

In presentation of the strategic objectives of aerial bombardment, the government was perpetually defensive, vacillating between post-event apologist justification of offensive operations and defensive justification of failures in air defences. The agenda of the public debate was always set by those criticising the government action.

A Cabinet report in August 1917 concluded; 'And the day may not be far off when aerial operations with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale may become the principal operations of war.'<sup>30</sup> Almost immediately, the Air Staff started building the concept of operations against populous centres arguing that, for effect, such a campaign required to be concentrated in terms of large numbers of aircraft attacking near-simultaneously.<sup>31</sup> This work led to the creation of the Independent Force whose focus was to be the aerial bombardment of German towns.<sup>32</sup> In command was General Trenchard who, with much of the 'traditionalist' High Command, continued to argue vociferously against this objective. He preferred a strategy of relentless offensive against tactical objectives near 'the Front', arguing '... the aeroplane is an offensive and not a defensive weapon.'<sup>33</sup> Trenchard maintained; 'The main object of the aerial forces should be action in battle, their action against the interior of Germany, although of undoubted importance from the point of view of economics and morale, can only be secondary.'<sup>34</sup>

Although the decision to bombard German towns was taken on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, Winston Churchill at the Ministry of Supply was not convinced of the utility of bombing of civil populations:

'It is improbable that any terrorization of the civil population which could be achieved by air attack would compel the government of a great nation to surrender . . . In our own case we have seen the

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<sup>29</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet 12 April 1917. TNA CAB 23/40/09.

<sup>30</sup> CABINET OFFICE Second Report of the Prime Minister's Committee on Air Organisation and Home Defence Against Air Raids. 17 Aug 1917 (The Smuts Report). TNA AIR 1/ 515/ 16/ 3/ 83.

<sup>31</sup> AIR STAFF Original Paper on Objectives 3 Sept 1917. TNA AIR 1/ 462/ 15/ 312/ 121.

<sup>32</sup> Neville Jones argues that the role of the Admiralty in the development of what became strategic bombing has been underplayed in the mainstream studies of the evolution of UK Strategic Bombing. JONES, N. 1973. *The Origins of Strategic Bombing; A Study of the Development of British Air Strategic Thought and Practice up to 1918*, London, Harper Collins.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in; BIDDLE, T. D. Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing 1914-1945. pp27-28

<sup>34</sup> Trenchard, quoted in JONES, H. A. 2002. *The War in the Air (Appendices). Being the story of the part played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force*, London, Naval & Military Press. Appendix X pp31-40

combative spirit of the people roused, not quelled, by the German air raids.<sup>35</sup>

This was at odds with the notes of Cabinet of 2<sup>nd</sup> October; '... it was pointed out that the public, and in particular the poorest classes, whose tenements are often of the flimsiest description, were tending to give way to panic.'<sup>36</sup> Cabinet also decided that the Prime Minister should meet the editors of the principal newspapers to 'restrain them from publishing detailed descriptive accounts and pictures ...'<sup>37</sup> Similarly: '... the Prime Minister impressed on General Trenchard the importance of making a success of the forthcoming air offensive, having regard to the effect that such a success would '...have on the moral of the people at home.'<sup>38</sup>

### **The inter-war years**

The doctrine of strategic aerial bombardment was championed by the Italian General Giulio Douhet, whose 1921 book 'The Command of the Air' challenged the accepted morality and rules of conventional war;

'...the battlefield will be limited only by the boundaries of the nations at war and all of their citizens will become combatants, since all of them will be exposed to the aerial offensives of the enemy. There will be no distinction any longer between soldiers and civilians.'<sup>39</sup>

More pertinent for Britain, Douhet's general views were similar to those of Lord Trenchard. On assuming command of the newly formed Royal Air Force in April 1918, Trenchard had adopted the concept of targeting populous industrial centres as the *raison-d'être* of the new force and a central plank in his argument for its continued independence from the other two forces.<sup>40</sup>

Douhet's 'big idea' was that the use of long range bombers to attack industrial and population centres would strike a nation's will to fight so decisively that it could win a war independently of the successes of the other military forces:

'First would come explosions, then fires, then deadly gases floating on the surface and preventing any approach to the stricken area. ... By the following day, the life of the city would be suspended ... A

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<sup>35</sup> 'Munitions Possibilities of 1918,' 21 Oct 1917 Reproduced in *ibid.* Appendix IV p18-22

<sup>36</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet am 2 Oct 1917. TNA CAB 23/4/17.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet pm 2 Oct 1917. TNA CAB 23/4/18.

<sup>39</sup> DOUHET, G. 1998. *The Command of the Air*, Washington, Air Force History and Museum Programme. P10

<sup>40</sup> BIDDLE, T. D. Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing 1914-1945. pp37-69 Biddle portrays uncompromisingly the departmental struggle that dominated the early existence of the Royal Air Force and the emerging dominance of Trenchard's theories.

complete breakdown of the social structure cannot but take place in a country subjected to this kind of merciless pounding from the air.’<sup>41</sup>

The Hague Conference of 1923 attempted to draw up rules of air warfare, but none of the attending powers ratified the Commission’s Draft;

‘Aerial bombardment is legitimate only when directed at a military objective ... The bombardment of cities, towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings not in the immediate neighbourhood of the operations of land forces is prohibited.’<sup>42</sup>

The Hague Convention of 1907 which predated aerial warfare had, however, been ratified and stated; ‘The attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended is prohibited.’<sup>43</sup> In a debate occasioned by an explosion and large and fatal leak of phosgene gas (already proscribed) from a German factory, Lord Halsbury bemoaned the nature of potential gas attacks on civilian populations, and the inability to prevent them; ‘The War proved that a determined attack could always get through. There may be casualties, but the attack will get through.’<sup>44</sup> He had already considered reprisal: ‘It is poor consolation that the only answer we can find to the destruction of half civilisation is that we should be able to destroy the other half.’<sup>45</sup> But he continued; ‘We are not in a position for reprisals ... We have not got the machines.’<sup>46</sup>

### **Inter-service views**

The debate within the British government and the RAF about the purpose of air forces was continuous and Trenchard was an adamant advocate;

‘... the object of all three Services is the same, to defeat the enemy nation, not merely its army, navy or air force.... Air power can dispense with that intermediate step, can pass over the enemy navies and armies, and penetrate the air defences and attack direct

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<sup>41</sup> DOUHET, G. 1998. *The Command of the Air*, Washington, Air Force History and Museum Programme. P58

<sup>42</sup> HAGUE CONFERENCE. 1923. *Rules concerning the Control of Wireless Telegraphy in Time of War and Air Warfare*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=3876F3A2997A8103C12563CD00518519> [Accessed 18 Dec 2013]. Article XXIV

<sup>43</sup> HAGUE CONFERENCE. 1907. *Convention (II) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=CD0F6C83F96FB459C12563CD002D66A1> [Accessed 18 Dec 2013]. Art 25

<sup>44</sup> HC Debate 11 July 1928. HANSARD vol 71 cc963-86.Col 975

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.Col 974

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.Col 975

the centres of production, transportation and communication from which the enemy war effort is maintained.'<sup>47</sup>

This could be interpreted as a means of avoiding the hideous attrition associated with trench warfare experienced by all of the Chiefs of Staff during the First World War. A more cynical interpretation might be that it was an attempt to preserve the independence of the RAF by articulation of a unique role.

At this meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, Trenchard, now the Chief of the Air Staff, considered arguments for and against aerial bombardment of military targets within cities.

'... Among military objectives must be included the factories in which war material is made, the depots in which it is stored, the railway termini and docks at which it is loaded or troops entrain or embark, and in the general means of communication and transportation of military personnel and material.... What is illegitimate, as being contrary to the dictates of humanity, is the indiscriminate bombing of a city for the sole purpose of terrorising the civilian population. It is an entirely different matter to terrorise munition workers (men and women) into absenting themselves from work or stevedores into abandoning the loading of a ship with munitions from fear of attack upon the factory or dock concerned. Moral effect is created by the bombing in such circumstances but it is the inevitable result of a lawful operation of war - the bombing of a military objective.'<sup>48</sup>

Trenchard's view was not shared by the other two services.

The Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) wrote in response;

'... it is taken for granted that direct air attack on the centres of production, transportation and communication must succeed in paralysing the life and effort of the community and therefore of winning the war. No evidence has so far been produced that such bombing in the face of counter attack will have such a result.'<sup>49</sup>

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) was similarly critical;

'...whilst the Memorandum sets out to show that all the objectives suggested are legitimate military ones, the result in practice would be that, though the objective might be a given boot factory, the actual target would be the town in which the factory happened to be located, and the victims would be its unarmed inhabitants.' He concluded; 'In war, concentration of effort alone can bring about

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<sup>47</sup> TRENCHARD, H. Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff for the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the War Object of an Air Force 2nd May 1928. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV, London, HMSO" pp71-76.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> MADDEN, C. Note by the Chief of Naval Staff for the Chief's of Staff Sub-Committee on the memorandum of the Chief of the Air Staff, 21st May 1928. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV, London, HMSO" pp81-83.



success, and my main anxiety, after studying the Air Staff Memorandum, is lest the acceptance of the views advanced may lead us in exactly the opposite direction.<sup>50</sup>

Both CNS and CIGS criticised Trenchard's proposals because there was no empirical evidence of the effect of bombing and because it did not appear to comply with Clausewitzian notions of strategy.<sup>51</sup> This was egregiously service-biased and narrow-minded. The result of concentration of effort in an industrial-age war, had been the defensive entrenchment of the autumn of 1914 and the inability to break the deadlock. The First World War had demonstrated the fundamental impact that even the primitive aircraft of the era had had, and neither the Royal Navy nor the British Army seem to have been willing to explore the inevitable potential. Ethically, both CIGS and CNS had reservations, probably with good cause.

Trenchard's evolving doctrine was exploring the boundaries of contemporary ethics. The concept of what is now complacently referred to as 'collateral damage' was novel, and there is little to suggest that the doctrine of 'double effect' was generally understood; it was certainly not common currency. In an almost unique but oblique reference to the concept in 1918, Jourdain quoted the Archbishop of Canterbury, '...[who] distinguish[ed] between the wounding and killing of non-combatants incidental to the bombardment of a fortified town as 'sometimes inevitable.'<sup>52</sup> The doctrine of 'double effect' suggests that the tactical benefits of this incidental effect may be exploited morally, but may not be the purpose of the action that causes them; thus the casualties caused by bombardment may be excused (but not legitimated), but must not be the purpose of the bombardment. In this context, the principle of proportionality also emerged – the double effect cannot be so overwhelming that the excusable casualties outweigh (or are disproportionate to) the tactical benefit sought.

The bleakest aspect of Trenchard's proposal was the apparently amoral synopsis with which it concluded;

'There can be no question, whatever views we may hold with regard to it, that this form of warfare will be used. ... whatever be the views held as to the legality, or the humanity, or the military wisdom and

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<sup>50</sup> MILNE, G. Note by the Chief of the General Staff for the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the Memorandum of the Chief of the Air Staff 21st May 1928. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV*, London, HMSO" pp76-81.

<sup>51</sup> CLAUSEWITZ, C. V. 2008. *On War*. In: HOWARD, M. & PARET, P. (eds.) Kindle ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Clausewitz's writings were based on his experiences in the Franco-Prussian war and still often suffer from direct transliteration into conflicts which transcend that land campaign.

<sup>52</sup> JOURDAIN, M. 1918. *Air Raid Reprisals and Starvation by Blockade*. *International Journal of Ethics*, 28, 542-553. P547

expediency of such operations, there is not the slightest doubt that in the next war both sides will send their aircraft out without scruple to bomb those objectives which they consider the most suitable.<sup>53</sup>

The 1935 RAF War Manual stated 'Although the bombardment of suitable objectives should result in considerable material damage and loss, the most important and far-reaching effect of air bombardment is its moral effect.'<sup>54</sup> Naturally, this debate was conducted in the utmost secrecy and not in the public domain.

Fiction had already outstripped military capability; in 1908 HG Wells had written 'The War in the Air' which had seized the public imagination, describing a world war in which aerial bombing would destroy every major city and bring about 'universal social collapse.'<sup>55</sup> He followed this up in 1914 with 'The World Set Free'<sup>56</sup> in which atomic<sup>57</sup> bombs are used to devastate cities during a putative world war set in 1956. In 1926 the novel '1944' portrayed gas attacks devastating London. In 1932 the film 'Things To Come'<sup>58</sup> presented the viewer with inexorable waves of enemy aircraft destroying British civilisation.

Each of these portrayals of future war had a pervasive sense of the inevitable vulnerability of the civilian. There was an appreciation that technological advances had moved warfare away from the relatively localised carnage of the battlefield where only combatants were at risk, to a future where civilian populations could become the object or more or less legitimate unintended casualties of aerial attack. It was in this mindset that Prime Minister Baldwin famously argued in Parliament that;

'I think it is well for the man in the street to realize that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through ... The only defence is offence. You have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves. I just mention that . . . so that people may realize what is waiting for them when the next war comes.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> TRENCHARD, H. Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff for the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the War Object of an Air Force 2nd May 1928. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV, London, HMSO" pp71-76.

<sup>54</sup> RAF War Manual Pt 1 May 1935 p1 quoted in OVERY, R. J. 2013. *The Bombing War; Europe 1939-1945*, London, Penguin. p48

<sup>55</sup> WELLS, H. G. 1908. *The War in the Air, and Particularly how Mr. Bert Smallways Fared While it Lasted*, London, George Bell and Sons. P312

<sup>56</sup> WELLS, H. G. 1914. *The World Set Free: A Story of Mankind*, London, Macmillan and Co.

<sup>57</sup> Wells anticipated the destructive potential of atomic energy after Rutherford published his 'Theory of Atomic Disintegration' in 1902; even though Rutherford did not actually split an atom until 1917.

<sup>58</sup> *Things to Come*, 1936. dvd. Directed by MENZIES, W. C.: London Film Productions.

<sup>59</sup> BALDWIN, S. HC Deb 10 November 1932. Hansard vol 270 cc632.

This fatalistic view was archetypical of the generation that had lived through the horrors of the First World War and found itself preparing for a second. Writing in 1944, Spaight concluded; 'If there was one subject upon which there was almost universal agreement before the war, it was, first, that another war would be the end of civilisation, and, secondly, that aircraft would be the prime agents in the causation of that end.'<sup>60</sup> Modern analysis tends to concur;

'That bombing would be an integral part of future war had been taken for granted by most Europeans in the late 1930s; it would have seemed almost inconceivable that states should willingly forego the most obvious instrument of total war.'<sup>61</sup>

If the British public and their leadership had not understood fully the potential for attack by aerial bombardment, the bombing of towns during the 1937 Spanish Civil War and the 1938 Japanese attacks on China seemed to vindicate Baldwin's prediction. The Times reported under the headline 'The Tragedy of Guernica: Town destroyed in Air Attack.'<sup>62</sup> A week later, the Guardian reported; 'Sky Black with Rebel 'Planes';

'Fire enveloped the whole city. Screams of lamentation were heard everywhere and the people, filled with terror, knelt, lifting their arms to heaven as if to implore divine protection. The 'planes descended to 200 meters letting loose a terrible machine gun fire.'<sup>63</sup>

In the Commons, Sir Archibald Sinclair suggested that '... [Guernica] was not a case in which civilians were killed in the course of ordinary bombardment, but was a deliberate effort to use air power as an instrument of massacre and terrorism.'<sup>64</sup> In the Lords the following day, Viscount Cecil denounced the raid as; '... one of the most horrible things that have ever been done'<sup>65</sup> and the Bishop of Winchester concluded '... an appalling outrage against all the laws of civilisation ... horror has been piled upon horror in this war ...'<sup>66</sup>

The Times editorial of 28<sup>th</sup> April suggested that bombardment might not cause the social breakdown that Douhet had suggested;

'The planning of the attack was murderously logical and efficient. Its aim was unquestionably to terrorise the Basque Government into surrender by showing them what Bilbao may soon expect. Yet so

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<sup>60</sup> SPAIGHT, J. 1944. *Bombing Vindicated*, London, Geoffrey Bles. P2

<sup>61</sup> OVERY, R. J. 2013. *The Bombing War; Europe 1939-1945*, London, Penguin.pxxiii

<sup>62</sup> TIMES. The Tragedy of Guernica: Town Destroyed in Air Attack. 28 April 1937, p.17 Col G.

<sup>63</sup> SCHAFER, M. & CRICHLLOW, S. 2002. The "Process-Outcome" Connection in Foreign Policy Decision Making: A Quantitative Study Building on Groupthink. *International Studies Quarterly*, 46, 45-68.

<sup>64</sup> SINCLAIR, A. House of Commons Debate 28 April 1937. Hansard vol 323 cc318.

<sup>65</sup> HL Debate 29 April 1937. HANSARD vol 105 cc84-92.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

far from having that effect, it may even defeat its object. It may merely inspire the proud democrats of Vizcaya with a passionate determination to fight to the end...'<sup>67</sup>

While the immediate response from the Basques was resolute, Bilbao did fall to Franco's forces before it was bombed, arguably due to fear of the repeat of the devastation visited upon Guernica.<sup>68</sup> Cabinet on 28<sup>th</sup> April did not discuss Guernica, although two telegrams from the British Ambassador to Spain which had arrived overnight occasioned a protracted discussion about the naval situation off Bilbao.<sup>69</sup> A week later, the Foreign Secretary reported that the bombing '... had been received with the utmost horror in America, where it was regarded as a practice for the bombing of London and Paris.'<sup>70</sup>

Guernica was bombed by less than 50 aircraft suited to short range attacks with small bomb loads, escorted by six modern single-seat fighter aircraft.<sup>71</sup> The Japanese bombing of Canton and Chungking in the summer of 1938 served to exacerbate fears of bombing. Chamberlain reported to the Commons;

'As a result of the raids, approximately 450 were killed and 1,000 wounded, and considerable damage was caused to private property ... whatever may have been the objects aimed at, most of the bombs fell on places which cannot be considered as of military importance.'<sup>72</sup>

The Guardian described the raids in a dispassionately objective report;

'...Bombs fell a mile away from the government buildings and half a mile from the railway station. There are no factories or anti-aircraft posts within a mile, but several schools, hospitals, hotels, as well as slums in the area.'<sup>73</sup>

The impression that London was vulnerable to this type of attack from German forces in 1938 was a serious overestimate of the capabilities of the Luftwaffe, but that mindset seems to have skewed much of British decision-making about the German threat and the British capability. During 1938, the military situation was regularly analysed for the government by the Chiefs of Staff (COS) and in their report on 13<sup>th</sup> September, they advised;

'...[German] AA defences and Air Raid precautions are believed to be in a high state of efficiency and readiness, and the large number

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<sup>67</sup> TIMES. The Tragedy of Guernica: Town Destroyed in Air Attack. 28 April 1937, p.17 Col G.

<sup>68</sup> PRESTON, P. 2012. The Destruction of Guernica. London: Harper Press. (Kindle Location 527)

<sup>69</sup> CABINET OFFICE Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet 28 April 1937. TNA CAB 23/88/07.

<sup>70</sup> CABINET OFFICE Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet on 5 May 1937. TNA CAB 23/88/08.

<sup>71</sup> PRESTON, P. 2012. The Destruction of Guernica. London: Harper Press. (Kindle Locations 189-190)

<sup>72</sup> CHAMBERLAIN, N. HC Debate 3 Jun 1938. HANSARD vol 336 cc2411-3.

<sup>73</sup> GUARDIAN. 1,100 Now Dead in Canton. 31 May 1938, p.11.

of German aerodromes confers great flexibility on her air forces which could concentrate at short notice in any area required.'<sup>74</sup>

'... 'It must be remembered that Germany's air power is at present considerably greater than our own. ...'<sup>75</sup>

'In view of the political objections to the initiation of any action by the Allies which might be misrepresented as an attack upon the civil populace, and the fact that the great initial advantage in air striking power which Germany possesses constitutes a potential menace to the security of this country, we consider that on balance we should be unwise to initiate air attacks upon industrial targets in Germany.'<sup>76</sup>

One modern commentator concludes that 'Air raid phobia – a combination of the perceived offensive advantage in the air and the overestimated German air power – was what powerfully deterred British intervention [at Munich]'<sup>77</sup> It certainly seems to have figured in the post-Munich debate in both houses of Parliament.

'I think that perhaps the greatest tribute which can be paid to the work of the Prime Minister lies in the fact that this Debate is taking place to-day under the peaceful conditions that now obtain, and not to the accompaniment of the roar of falling bombs, the fear of which was so present in the mind of every one of us, on whatever side of the House we sit, a few days ago.'<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps more illuminating is Viscount Sankey;

'I was sorry to read in a paper of repute the other day that had it not been for Mr. Chamberlain's intervention German aeroplanes would have been raining bombs over London. Yes, but it might have added that British aeroplanes would have been raining bombs over Cologne and Berlin ...'<sup>79</sup>

Sankey reflected both the fear of German attack, but also the prevalent ignorance of the real state of RAF capability to retaliate. One modern analyst concludes 'In 1939, the British people expected both to be bombed and to bomb others.'<sup>80</sup> Cabinet, informed by the COS papers, shared the fear that the Germans were able to inflict significant British casualties, but also believed that the UK had inadequate defences and was not in a position to retaliate in kind at all.

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<sup>74</sup> COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE Appreciation of the Situation in the Event of War Against Germany (COS 764) 13 Sept 1938. TNA CAB 53/41 (pp81-95). para 11

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. para 23

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. para 28

<sup>77</sup> LEE, G. 2010. I See Dead People: Air-Raid Phobia and Britain's Behaviour in the Munich Crisis. *Security Studies*, 13, 42. p265

<sup>78</sup> Cdr Sir Archibald Southby HC Debate 03 October 1938. HANSARD vol 339 cc40-162.Col 114

<sup>79</sup> Viscount SANKEY HL Debate 03 October 1938. HANSARD vol 110 cc1297-366.Col 1347

<sup>80</sup> CONNELLY, M. 2002. The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany, 1939–45. *Contemporary British History*, 16, 39-48.p44

The 14 RAF contingency Air Plans for Europe prior to the outbreak of war included;

‘Plans for attacking enemy’s manufacturing resources in the Ruhr, Rhineland and Saar (WA5)... Plans for attacking enemy’s air manufacturing resources in Germany (WA6)... Plans for the attack on specially important depots or accumulations of warlike stores other than air, in enemy country (WA8) ... Plans for attack on enemy’s headquarter and administrative offices in Berlin and elsewhere (WA13).’<sup>81</sup>

This was very much in line with Trenchard’s view that the aircraft should be used for offensive operations, and complied with the letter of the 1923 Convention.

Unfortunately, despite the doctrinal emphasis on bombing of strategic targets in the enemy homeland, the RAF did not have the capability to achieve any of these plans; the RAF had no long range aircraft capable of substantial bombloads; there was no tactical doctrine for the protection of bombers against fighter defences and, crucially, there was no means of accurate navigation over long distances other than visual; clearly this was even more limiting at night. How this gap between doctrinal aspirations and the realities of capability evolved is examined by Biddle<sup>82</sup> and is not pertinent here; the implications of the difference between pre-war expectation and the reality, however, is critical to the evolution of British thinking on, and conduct of, strategic bombing.

## **The Second World War**

At the start of the Second World War, there was little appetite for British forces to be involved in bombing operations against civil targets. Echoing the articles of the 1923 Air Power Convention, which had been unanimously confirmed by the League of Nations in 1938, Chamberlain had told the Commons;

‘In the first place, it is against international law to bomb civilians as such and to make deliberate attacks upon civilian populations. ... In the second place, targets which are aimed at from the air must be legitimate military objectives and must be capable of identification. In the third place, reasonable care must be taken in attacking these military objectives so that by carelessness a civilian population in the neighbourhood is not bombed.’<sup>83</sup>

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, President Roosevelt issued a public appeal to hostile governments;

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<sup>81</sup> COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE War Plans: Report by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee (COS 781) 25 October 1938. TNA CAB 53/41 (pp268-285). pp16-17

<sup>82</sup> BIDDLE, T. D. Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing 1914-1945.

<sup>83</sup> CHAMBERLAIN, N. HC Deb 21 June 1938. Hansard vol 337 cc937-938.

‘...publicly to affirm its determination that its armed forces shall in no event and under no circumstances undertake bombardment from the air of civilian populations or unfortified cities, upon the understanding that the same rules of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all their opponents.’<sup>84</sup>

The British government responded publicly;

‘...it was already the settled policy of his Majesty's Government, should they become involved in hostilities, to refrain from such action and confine bombardment to strictly military objectives on the understanding that those same rules will be scrupulously observed by all their opponents.’<sup>85</sup>

Given the fear of the perceived German offensive dominance, this position suited the British strategically as well.

In the debate in the Lords on 13<sup>th</sup> September, Lord Mottistone sought a perpetual commitment to this position; ‘do [the government] adhere absolutely to this document?’<sup>86</sup> arguing that; ‘This mutual destruction can have no effect on the result of the war’ and constructing his case against bombing cities on this assumption. In reply, Lord Halifax (Foreign Secretary) only indirectly challenged the assumption that bombing cities was of no value;

‘It is also quite obvious that with the advance of science, and ... the fusion of all the activities of a nation, military, civil and industrial, into one gigantic war effort, the distinction to be drawn between combatant and non-combatant becomes vastly more difficult to draw in these days, and to maintain.’<sup>87</sup>

Halifax continued;

‘...the restrictions that His Majesty's Government have imposed upon the operations of their own forces were based upon the condition of similar restraint being observed by their opponents, and His Majesty's Government must hold themselves completely free, if such restraint is not in fact observed, to take such action as they may deem appropriate.’<sup>88</sup>

It was this open right of retaliation that was picked up and supported in the press the following day, as well as a swipe at the immorality of the German actions;

‘... Until the proposed atrocities are actually committed, the British Government, with the French, will certainly not depart from the assurance that both have given to the President of the United States that they will ‘confine bombardment to strictly military objectives on

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<sup>84</sup> Reported in the TIMES. Air Bombing of Civilians. 2 Sept 1939, p.10.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> MOTTISTONE House of Lords Debate 13 September 1939. Hansard vol 114 cc1047.

<sup>87</sup> HALIFAX House of Lords Debate 13 September 1939. Hansard vol 114 cc1050-1052. Col 1050

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Col 1052

the understanding that those same rules will be scrupulously observed by all their opponents.’ But Lord Halifax, in replying to Lord Mottistone yesterday, gave a clear warning that the promise is only binding under the condition stated. If the enemy do not in fact observe the same restraint, then we must retain our own complete freedom of action.’<sup>89</sup>

This debate, of course, echoes almost exactly the 1917 reprisal debate. Lord Strabolgi supporting Mottistone, was concerned about the descent from a high moral intent as war progressed;

‘... we are only in the early days of this war. Passions have not, on the whole, been aroused, and those of us who remember what happened in the last war will be well aware that, before very much longer, natural but bitter feelings will arise in people's minds and there will be demands for reprisals and demands for giving what is called ‘a taste of their own medicine’ to our enemies and so on.’<sup>90</sup>

He was quite right; the War Cabinet decided on 10<sup>th</sup> May that the government would; ‘now publicly proclaim that it reserves to itself the right to take any action which it considers appropriate in the event of bombing by the enemy of civil populations.’<sup>91</sup>

The proclamation was reported verbatim in the Times the following day. The fight for the moral high ground over the bombing of non-combatants had already started.

By the start of the Second World War, the pervasive view held by the public and in government was that bombers would always get through and were capable of wreaking such damage on a society that they could cause its breakdown. There was very clear aversion to this being a tenable means for Britain to wage war, both in government, in the press coverage, and in the public at large but it appears that Strabolgi was right in his assessment that as the war progressed, its realities would overcome these moral restraints.

During the Battle of Britain, Churchill (ever the pragmatist) had already perceived that the only way to take the offensive against Germany was; ‘...an absolutely devastating, exterminating attack by very heavy bombers from this country upon the Nazi homeland. We must be able to overwhelm him by this means, without which I do not see a way through.’<sup>92</sup> The Defence Committee of the War Cabinet discussed

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<sup>89</sup> TIMES. Bombing of Open Towns. 14 September 1939, p.9.

<sup>90</sup> STRABOLGI House of Lords Debate 13 September 1939. Hansard vol 114 col 1052.

<sup>91</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet Friday 10th May 1940. TNA CAB 69/1 p4.

<sup>92</sup> Memorandum; Prime Minister to Minister of Aircraft Production dated 8 July 1940. Quoted CHURCHILL, W. 2010. Their Finest Hour. New York: Rosetta Stone. Kindle Location 9798



retaliatory bombing of German towns in September 1940 when the focus of German air attack shifted from RAF airfields to towns and cities:

‘The Prime Minister said that his inclination was to announce that the Germans were dropping parachute mines indiscriminately on the civil population of this country, and that, consequently, we intended to retaliate on German cities ... [Air Chief Marshall] Sir Cyril Newall; ...strongly favoured a continuation of our policy of attacking military objectives with bombs. Many of these objectives would be near centres of population, and by attacking them we should affect the morale and living conditions of the German public.’<sup>93</sup>

Churchill subsequently wrote;

‘About the same time the enemy began to drop by parachute numbers of naval mines of a weight and explosive power never carried by aircraft before. Many formidable explosions took place. To this there was no defence except reprisal. The abandonment by the Germans of all pretence of confining the air war to military objectives had also raised this question of retaliation. I was for it, but I encountered many conscientious scruples.’<sup>94</sup>

This suggests, in a way that official records might not, that there were extensive discussions involving ‘scruples’.

Newall’s intervention suggests a very particular interpretation of Chamberlain’s 1939 assurance that British forces would never be ordered to bomb civilian targets; the civilian casualties and effect on morale and living conditions would not be the purpose of the attacks, merely a side-effect of attacks on military targets. This was a simple but carefully constrained extrapolation of the ‘double-effect’ doctrine advocated by Trenchard in 1928.

Although not present at this session, Attlee was a member of the Defence Committee and later wrote of the decision to bomb cities;

‘Of course the ultimate responsibility for the bombing policy lay with the Cabinet, and I don’t seek to evade it, but I thought that concentration on strategic targets such as oil installations would have paid better ... But how much was effected by the bombing of the cities – which contained armament factories of course – is a question. The German morale stood up to it pretty well.’<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> CABINET OFFICE Defence Committee (Operations) Minutes of a meeting of the War Cabinet Tuesday 24 Sept 1940. TNA CAB 69/1 p204.

<sup>94</sup> CHURCHILL, W. 2010. *Their Finest Hour*. New York: Rosetta Stone. Kindle Location 5419

<sup>95</sup> WILLIAMS, F. 1962. *Twilight of Empire; Memoirs of Prime Minister Clement Attlee*, New York, A S Barnes & Co. P49

British morale stood up to the Blitz pretty well too. Indeed Churchill records meeting survivors of a bombing raid during a visit in September 1940;

'When we got back into the car a harsher mood swept over this haggard crowd. 'Give it 'em back,' they cried, and 'Let them have it too.' I undertook forthwith to see that their wishes were carried out; and this promise was certainly kept.'<sup>96</sup>

Throughout the war, Bombing Policy was dictated by the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet.<sup>97</sup> A February 1942 Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW) memorandum describes exactly how policy was made;

'The general aims of bombing are laid down by the Defence Committee with the advice of the Chiefs of Staff. These aims are embodied in a directive which is sent to Bomber Command together with the recommendations of the Air Staff regarding the particular objectives which should be attacked in order to achieve the aims.'<sup>98</sup>

Three years later, Commander in Chief of Bomber Command Air Marshall Harris was characteristically blunt about this level of specific direction and the lack of independence of his command;

'On policy and strategy I take my instructions at present from the D/CAS ... In fact I now hold only the tactical, technical and administrative command of a force where operations are otherwise dictated, virtually ad hoc, by the climate, the Air Ministry, SHAEF and enemy reactions - in that order of impact and import.'<sup>99</sup>

Despite the apparently well-defined pre-war doctrine and the fourteen bombing plans, initial efforts were not well coordinated. The primary bombing targets were oil, the aircraft industry, the aluminium industry and railway communications. In Cabinet, Eden and Alexander had argued for the bombing of the German people, as some form of retribution, and in January 1941 the priority was shifted to oil, with large industrial cities and communications as alternatives.<sup>100</sup> After two months, the priority shifted again to submarine building yards and ancillary industries, factories

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<sup>96</sup> CHURCHILL, W. 2010. *Their Finest Hour*. New York: Rosetta Stone. Kindle Location 9798-9804

<sup>97</sup> There is a historiographical debate about the influence on, and culpability for, bombing policy of subordinate commanders, particularly Air Marshall Harris, CINC Bomber Command 1942-45. In my opinion, this debate is founded on an overestimate of the influence on policy, and independence of command, of 'field commanders'. Harris's own frustration at his prescribed scope for initiative is very clear from the correspondence with Portal in the winter of 1944-45 cited below. This thesis proceeds on the understanding that Bombing Policy was dictated by Cabinet, in accordance with the description at Lawrence's memo below.

<sup>98</sup> WARFARE, M. O. E. *Night Bombing as an Instrument of Economic Warfare* 4th Feb 42, briefing by OL Lawrence. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945* Vol IV, London, HMSO" pp214-219.

<sup>99</sup> AIR STAFF Letter Harris to Portal ATH/DO/4 (J) dated 18 Jan 45. DEAN 02/10 (ATH/DO/4) Liddell Hart Archives.

<sup>100</sup> CABINET OFFICE Defence Committee (Operations) Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet 13 Jan 1941. TNA CAB 69/2 pp36-40.

assembling long range aircraft and naval bases in Germany and occupied territory.<sup>101</sup>

In July 1941, the Air Ministry produced 'Bomber Command' a 130-page pamphlet describing Bomber Command's Offensive against the Axis to date. Clearly it is propaganda; British crews are capable of considerable physical and mental endurance; brave yet cautious; cool, yet daring.<sup>102</sup> The pamphlet describes the British bombing effort;

'Bomber Command was to leap across the protective barrier of his armies and strike at his vital centres, so as to destroy his factories and oil refineries and to disrupt his communications – in a word, to dislocate and bring ruin to his military economy.'<sup>103</sup>

'Many a tribute was paid to the accuracy of our bombing. It was said on all sides ... that the British only attacked military objectives and that anyone not living in their neighbourhood was in no danger.'<sup>104</sup>

Less straightforward, the pamphlet also addresses morale; 'What then has been the effect of our raids on the morale of the Germans? The importance of this aspect of our bombing attacks on them needs no emphasis...'<sup>105</sup> This statement explicitly makes the assumption that bombing legitimately targets the morale of the population.

JM Spaight had been a senior civil servant in the Air Department, retiring in 1937 as Principal Assistant Secretary. He had published regularly on air warfare, becoming an acknowledged authority,<sup>106</sup> and collaborated with Liddell-Hart in the production of the 1938 series 'The Next War', writing 'The Next Air War'.<sup>107</sup> Although never writing for the Air Ministry in an official capacity, Spaight remained remarkably well-informed and he continued to publish throughout the Second World War. In a 1940 article he wrote;

'Night-flying raiders groping for a particular factory or military establishment will probably have to plaster the whole area with bombs.... The indiscriminate bombing which such a method of trying

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<sup>101</sup> JOINT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE Effect of Bombing Policy: Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee JIC(42)117(D) 6th April 1942. TNA CAB 79/20/16 pp128-156. Para 2

<sup>102</sup> AIR STAFF Bomber Command; The Air Ministry Account of Bomber Command's Offensive against the Axis September 1939-July 1941. London: HMSO.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p104

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p123

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p122

<sup>106</sup> HOLMAN, B. 2006. *Airminded - Airpower and British Society 1908-1941* [Online]. University of New England, Armidale, Australia. Available: <http://airminded.org/biographies/j-m-spaight/> [Accessed 16 March 2014].

<sup>107</sup> SPAIGHT, J. M. 1938. *Air Power in the Next War*, London, Geoffrey Bles,.

to hit a given objective would involve is hardly a practice which either side will be eager to initiate. Not only would the effect upon neutral opinion be unfavourable to the belligerent who began it, but the result would inevitably be to stiffen the determination of the nation which figured as the first victim of such an attack.<sup>108</sup>

At the time, this was entirely coherent with the bombing policy declared by the British government and followed by the RAF.

Prior to the war, Cabinet had been concerned about the vulnerability of British civilians to indiscriminate German bombing. The intent for British strategic bombing was in accordance with Trenchard's view that the bomber would '... attack direct the centres of production, transportation and communication from which the enemy war effort is maintained.'<sup>109</sup> There was a clearly articulated expectation that precision bombing would enable this policy while minimising civilian casualties, and this was the public policy. Debilitating casualties in daylight operations forced acknowledgement of the vulnerability of the RAF bombers and a switch to night operations which were fraught with navigation problems. This in turn precluded the precision required to attack specific targets in order to realise Trenchard's ambition.

Instructions to Bomber Command in July reflected this reality; '... you will direct the main effort of the bomber force, until further instructions, towards dislocating the German transportation system and to destroying the morale of the civil population as a whole and of the industrial workers in particular.'<sup>110</sup> Detailed instructions followed;

'... successful attack of a specific target at night can only be undertaken in clear moonlight. It follows therefore, that for approximately 3/4 of each month it is only possible to obtain satisfactory results by heavy, concentrated and continuous bombing of large working class and industrial areas in carefully selected towns.'<sup>111</sup>

This view was supported in Cabinet throughout the summer: 'Mr Butler said that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs felt strongly that no departure should be made from our present policy of attacking civilian morale in Western Germany.'<sup>112</sup> That

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<sup>108</sup> SPAIGHT, J. 1940. The War in the Air; first phase. *Foreign Affairs*, 18.

<sup>109</sup> TRENCHARD, H. Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff for the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the War Object of an Air Force 2nd May 1928. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV, London, HMSO" pp71-76.

<sup>110</sup> AIR STAFF Bombing Directive 9 July 1941. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV, London, HMSO" pp135-139.

<sup>111</sup> WEBSTER, C. & FRANKLAND, N. 1961c. *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV - Appendices*, London, HMSO.

<sup>112</sup> CABINET OFFICE War Cabinet; Chiefs of Staff Committee. Minutes of a Meeting held on 14 Jul 1941. TNA CAB 79/12 pp438-440.

said, however, the War Cabinet also decided not to retaliate against Italian air raids on Alexandria Harbour, concluding '...that these were not directed against the civilian population but had been aimed at the harbour which was a legitimate target.'<sup>113</sup>

A report to the Air Staff in August 1941 detailed the lack of bombing precision with only between 10% and 40% of bomber aircraft actually reaching the designated target, and of those, only 30% managing to drop their bombs within 5 miles of the target.<sup>114</sup> After that report;

'... primary targets selected for night bombing were marshalling yards, centres of rail and water transport, submarine bases and shipbuilding yards [and after February 1942] night bombing [was] devoted primarily to selected industrial areas, attacks on particular factories being attempted only when conditions are perfect.'<sup>115</sup>

A memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air in February 1942 recommended;

'a greater bombing effort be made against Germany for the following reasons (i) This is the time of year to get the best results from concentrated incendiary attack... (iii) The coincidence of attacks with Russian successes would further depress German morale ... (iii) A new navigation aid is about to come into service... I therefore recommend (a) that the heavy bomber force be employed without restriction until further notice on the attack of industrial areas and selected precise targets in North-West Germany...'<sup>116</sup>

It stipulated Essen, Cologne, Duisburg, Dusseldorf and Gelsenkirchen as the primary industrial areas to be targeted.

Accordingly, the Bombing Directive of 14<sup>th</sup> February 1942 instructed; 'It has been decided that the primary objective of your operations should now be focussed on the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular of the industrial workers.'<sup>117</sup> Portal (Chief of the Air Staff) wrote the next day to his staff:

'Ref the new bombing directive: I suppose it is clear that the aiming points are to be the built-up areas, not, for instance, the dockyards

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<sup>113</sup> CABINET OFFICE Defence Committee (Operations) Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet 3 July 1941. TNA CAB 69/2 pp271-277.

<sup>114</sup> Air Staff: 'Report by Mr. Butt to Bomber Command on his Examination of Night Photographs, 18 August 1941' reproduced in WEBSTER, C. & FRANKLAND, N. 1961c. *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV - Appendices*, London, HMSO. pp205-213

<sup>115</sup> JOINT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE Effect of Bombing Policy: Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee JIC(42)117(D) 6th April 1942. TNA CAB 79/20/16 pp128-156. Para 3-7

<sup>116</sup> CABINET OFFICE Defence Committee (Operations) Memorandum on Bombing Policy DO(42)14, 9 Feb 1942. TNA CAB 69-4 pp182-183.

<sup>117</sup> AIR STAFF Bombing Directive 14 February 1942. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV*, London, HMSO" pp143-145.

or aircraft factories where these are mentioned in Appendix A. This must be made quite clear if not already understood.<sup>118</sup>

Spaight's commentary on the 'War in the Air' had been updated in 1941:

'... the incursions of the Royal Air Force into Germany and of the Luftwaffe into Britain have steadily increased in frequency and vigour. Those of the British airmen have been aimed exclusively at impairing Germany's military strength. Oil refineries, synthetic oil plants and petrol storage depots have been among the chief targets... [RAF] pilots and bomb-aimers had been trained to a pitch not even approached by those of the Luftwaffe. Precision of aim was inculcated and practised. Long periods were spent in the search for and exact location of targets. If the designated objective could not be found, and if no alternative target could be bombed with reasonable precision, no attack was launched.'<sup>119</sup>

However, whilst this was consistent with the declared policy, it was no longer an accurate reflection of the operations themselves.

In his analysis of the relations between the press and the government ministries, one commentator describes a relationship evolving rapidly. For the first time, the government had to deal with 'the media'; newspapers, radio and, particularly demanding, the newsreels;

'The newsreels were regarded as extremely important forms of information by the government, thanks to their potent combination of words and moving images. Worried that the newsreels might display material that would make the government uncomfortable, the Ministry of Information was ordered to make newsreels a top priority case... All of which demanded that the censor had to see material before it was edited and once it was assembled in final form. ... In turn, this probably made newsreel companies more likely to lean towards the official interpretation of events in order to smooth the passage of their product.'<sup>120</sup>

Connelly describes serious tensions between the Ministry of Information and the Service Ministries, particularly the Air Ministry, with one meeting with the BBC in late 1941 leading the BBC to conclude that there was '...an embarrassing lack of coordination on the presentation of the British bombing war. The BBC delegates were immediately aware of an argument that had been going on behind the scenes.'<sup>121</sup> However much the BBC understood the tensions between declaratory

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in MIDDLEBROOK, M. & EVERITT, C. 1985. *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book 1939-1945*, Harmondsworth, Viking Penguin. P240

<sup>119</sup> SPAIGHT, J. 1941. The War in the Air; Second Phase. *Foreign Affairs*, 19, 408-413.

<sup>120</sup> CONNELLY, M. 2002. The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany, 1939-45. *Contemporary British History*, 16, 39-48. P42.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Pp42-44

and operational policy, they did not publicise them. The British media of the day were resolutely behind the bombing campaign, but they understood it was being conducted against military targets.

Under the headline 'Bombs on Berlin', The Daily Mirror had reported on the RAF raid on Berlin in September 1940; 'Typical of RAF bombing operations, the raid was made by a force of bombers which delivered their attack with great precision.'<sup>122</sup>

The editorial went on to demand that an offensive policy was the only one acceptable; 'The air war is no time for lecturers and gloved persons wishing to live up to a high standard of ancient chivalry. The invention of the bombing plane abolished chivalry for ever. It is now 'retaliate or go under'.<sup>123</sup> The broadsheets were no less committed to supporting the efforts of Bomber Command; '... In war, reprisals can be exacted only for want of a policy ...The purpose of bombing, as of all military action, is to bring the war to a successful end as quickly as possible.'<sup>124</sup> This of course, is a complete derogation from the position described as 'haphazard murder' by the Guardian in September 1915.<sup>125</sup> The press had achieved the descent from moral high ground to amoral pragmatism that had so concerned Lord Strabolgi in only 18 months.

There is little evidence of objections at this stage, and what there was, was disregarded. When asked in November 1941 about the 'Committee for the Abolition of Night Bombing' the Home Secretary responded 'I have no reason to suppose that this misguided propaganda is attracting or will attract any serious attention.'<sup>126</sup> In a similar exchange earlier in 1941, when the Pacifist MP Richard Stokes had protested and indicated his intent to raise the matter formally, the response was; 'That is exactly what Hitler would like.'<sup>127</sup> This suggests that the dominant view was that to question the morality of the bombing campaign would in turn harm the British war effort.

However, the Archbishop of Canterbury, opening the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury on 27 May 1941 stated;

'... It is one thing to bomb military objectives, to cripple the industries on which the prosecution of the war depends, and, alas! in so doing it may be impossible to avoid inflicting loss and suffering on many civilians. It is a very different thing to adopt the infliction of this loss

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<sup>122</sup> DAILY MIRROR. Bombs on Berlin. 12 Sept 1940. p3

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p5

<sup>124</sup> GUARDIAN. Heavy Bombing. 1941 Apr 19.

<sup>125</sup> GUARDIAN. Zeppelin Commander on his Task. 25 Sep 1915, p.6.

<sup>126</sup> HC Debate 27 November 1941. HANSARD vol 376 cc886-7.

<sup>127</sup> HC Debate 24 July 1941. HANSARD vol 373 cc1051-2.

as a deliberate policy. ... I do not believe that the great majority of British folk, even in the bombed areas, really want such a policy. It is to be hoped that the Government will resist any pressure and make it clear that they will adhere to their declared policy.<sup>128</sup>

This moral endorsement was obviously absolutely conditional on the assumption that the RAF was engaged in precision bombing and that civilian casualties were the unavoidable by-product.

In May 1942, Mr Justice Singleton was commissioned to conduct an independent investigation into the effect of the bombing policy;

‘In the light of our experience of the German bombing of this country, and of such information is available of the results of our bombing of Germany ... If an industrial area, which has as its centre important factories engaged on war work, is taken and dealt with thoroughly by concentration of bombing better results are likely to be achieved.’<sup>129</sup>

Singleton recognised that the technical limitations highlighted by the Butt report had a serious impact;

‘... Unless and until a greater measure of accuracy in target finding can be reached it will probably prove to be good policy to keep chiefly to targets which can be found fairly easily. This course limits the number of targets considerably but it is much better to treat a second-rate target thoroughly than to fail in an attack on one of a higher calibre ... it is concentrated bombing that is needed, and systematic bombing.’<sup>130</sup>

And he summarised;

‘... the effect on Germany’s war production and effort will be very heavy over a period of twelve or eighteen months, and such as to have real effect on the war position.’<sup>131</sup>

### **Area bombing?**

Singleton’s report provided independent verification of an earlier Joint Intelligence Committee report which had also considered the salient factors affecting the bombing mission: damage to factories, the hold-up of a number of fighter aircraft on defence work, by keeping occupied a large number of men and guns on anti-aircraft work and on searchlights and a very large number on air raid precautions and the

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<sup>128</sup> Reported in GUARDIAN. Primate Condemns "Retaliation". 1941 May 28.

<sup>129</sup> CABINET OFFICE Cabinet Office Report by Mr Justice Singleton: "The Bombing of Germany" May 1942. TNA PREM 3/11/24 (112). P3

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. P4

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. P4



lowering of morale.<sup>132</sup> The Chiefs of Staff were able to draw on monthly estimates of the effects of bombing on Germany's war effort, and the Bombing Policy was regularly altered accordingly. Lord Cherwell, Churchill's scientific advisor, supported area bombing;

'Investigation seems to show that having one's house demolished is most damaging to morale. People seem to mind it more than having their friends or even relatives killed. At Hull signs of strain were evident, though only one-tenth of the houses were demolished. On the above figures, we should be able to do ten times as much harm to each of the 58 principal German towns. There seems little doubt that this would break the spirit of the people.'<sup>133</sup>

His position was supported fully by Sinclair (Secretary of State for Air); '... we see no reason to doubt that within eighteen months, and with American help, the degree of destruction which Lord Cherwell suggests is possible can, in fact, be achieved.'<sup>134</sup>

Having considered the salient tactical factors in his assessment of the effect of the bombing, Singleton had concluded; 'The question of morale is a much more difficult one with which to deal. There has been no break of morale in this country, although some people think that there was a danger of it locally on one or two occasions when bombing suddenly ceased.'<sup>135</sup> British Air Intelligence had surveyed the effect of the German bombing campaign on the UK in August 1941 and concluded that 'no town in England has suffered a breakdown in morale.'<sup>136</sup>

Between 1941 and 1944 the capabilities of Bomber Command had increased with aircraft now capable of carrying over five tons of explosives into Germany.

Singleton continued;

'Now we expect to be able to deliver to Germany in the future a much greater weight of bombs than we received. ... I doubt whether our bombing ability is, or in the near future can be, sufficient to bring about a break in morale in this way alone. Herein again arises the importance of increased accuracy. I prefer to think of the effect on morale combined with the other factors and envisage the bombing of an industrial area with important factories in the centre, rather

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<sup>132</sup> JOINT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE Effect of Bombing Policy: Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee JIC(42)117(D) 6th April 1942. TNA CAB 79/20/16 pp128-156. page 5 para 4

<sup>133</sup> CABINET OFFICE Defence Committee (Operations) Memorandum; Estimation of Bombing Effect DO(42)38, 9 Apr 1942. TNA CAB 69/2 pp267. (The De-Housing Paper)

<sup>134</sup> CABINET OFFICE Defence Committee (Operations) Memorandum; Estimation of Bombing Effect DO(42)39, 13 Apr 1942. TNA CAB 69/4.

<sup>135</sup> CABINET OFFICE Cabinet Office Report by Mr Justice Singleton: "The Bombing of Germany" May 1942. TNA PREM 3/11/24 (112). P4

<sup>136</sup> AIR INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENT Air Defence of Great Britain: Volume III: App A; Morale. TNA AIR 41/17. P1

than the bombing of houses, and I think better results will be achieved thereby.<sup>137</sup>

This sophisticated position, very precisely between the deliberately indiscriminate bombing of cities for the purpose of 'dehousing' and the precision bombing of 'military-industrial' targets, is probably the most accurate depiction of British Bombing policy after 1942. It is exquisitely poised on the knife edge of the 'double effect' and collateral damage issue discussed above.

There was a very small minority of MPs who queried the policy of area bombing as the British campaign developed. In 1941 Richard Stokes MP, had dismissed night bombing as 'contagious lunacy'.<sup>138</sup> In March 1943, he pressed home his questions; '...my constant objection has been to what I call indiscriminate night bombing – and bombing must be indiscriminate at night...'<sup>139</sup> He challenged Balfour (Under-Secretary of State for Air) to reconcile 'his statement [about not bombing indiscriminately] with the statement of the Secretary of State for Air that we have obliterated 160 acres of built-up area – working class dwellings – around Essen in our attempts to hit Krupp's works.' Balfour replied;

'Of course, war is cruel and destructive, and the destruction of property and cities is inevitable, but again, I give the assurance that there is no change in our policy, that our purpose is to destroy Germany's industry, transport and war industry and war potential, and that we are not wantonly bombing women and children for the sake of doing so.'<sup>140</sup>

Stokes pushed his point again two weeks later, asking Sinclair 'whether on any occasion instructions have been given to British airmen to engage in area bombing rather than limit their attention to purely military targets?' to which Sinclair replied; 'The targets of Bomber Command are always military, but night bombing of military objectives necessarily involves bombing the area in which they are situated.'<sup>141</sup>

Air Marshall Harris, CINC Bomber Command, was perturbed at the difference between public and operational policy; 'I personally thought this was asking for trouble; there was nothing to be ashamed of, except in the sense that everybody might be ashamed of the sort of thing that has to be done in every war, as of war itself.'<sup>142</sup> The Air Staff responded that;

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<sup>137</sup> CABINET OFFICE Cabinet Office Report by Mr Justice Singleton: "The Bombing of Germany" May 1942. TNA PREM 3/11/24 (112). P4

<sup>138</sup> HC Debate 24 July 1941. HANSARD vol 373 cc1051-2.

<sup>139</sup> HC Debate 11 March 1943. HANSARD vol 387 cc922-62.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> HC Debate 31 March 1943. HANSARD vol 388 c155.

<sup>142</sup> HARRIS, A. 1947. *The Bomber Offensive*, Barnsley, Collins. P58

‘No attempt has been made to conceal from the public the immense devastation that is being brought to the German industrial cities... the widespread devastation is not an end in itself but the inevitable accompaniment of an all-out attack on the enemy’s means and capacity to wage war. ... It is, in any event, desirable to present the bomber offensive in such a light as to provoke the minimum of public controversy and so far as possible to avoid conflict with religious and humanitarian opinion. Any public protest, whether reasonable or unreasonable, against the bomber offensive could not but hamper the Government in the execution of this policy and might affect the morale of the aircrews themselves.’<sup>143</sup>

From time to time, the priority was afforded to other targets such as supporting the D Day landings and Ministry of Economic Warfare priorities such as oil refineries or ball bearing production, but it was Singleton’s position that Harris argued with Portal in late 1944;

‘The main concentration has been against the Ruhr whenever the conditions made this economical. The targets selected have been oil targets, rail centres, canal systems and the major centres of population. ...Area bombing must enter into any scheme, because in bad weather we have to use sky markers, we must have a large target ... and we necessarily in those conditions paint with a large brush.’<sup>144</sup>

Harris subsequently wrote that;

‘... the policy of destroying industrial cities, and the factories in them, was not merely the only possible one for Bomber Command at that time, it was also the best way of destroying Germany’s capacity to produce war material. The morale of the enemy under bombing could be taken as an imponderable factor.’<sup>145</sup>

He was clearly committed to the policy of area bombing of industrial targets; in this, he was inclined to follow Trenchard’s 1928 doctrine, and he does not appear to have been philosophically committed to morale as a target. In his efforts to destroy industrial capacity, the workforce would become casualties.

### **Opposition to the RAF strategic bombing campaign**

In 1944, the small, but vociferous, opposition to the bombing campaign published ‘The Seed of Chaos’. This pamphlet described the campaign as ‘obliteration bombing’ and quotes a ‘foreign observer’ writing for the News Chronicle;

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<sup>143</sup> AIR STAFF Letter Street to Harris CS.21079/43 dated 15 Dec 43. TNA 14/843.

<sup>144</sup> AIR STAFF Letter Harris to Portal ATH/DO/4 (A) dated 1 Nov 44. DEAN 02/10 (ATH/DO/4) Liddell Hart Archives.

<sup>145</sup> HARRIS, A. 1947. *The Bomber Offensive*, Barnsley, Collins. P88

‘... the principle behind your raids is to make sure of hitting important targets by wiping out the whole area in which they lie ... This is obviously the only way to get results in a highly industrialised country like Germany, but it also has the advantage of producing an automatic effect on the population... There is a definite point at which the weight of bombs dropped in a certain area in a certain time produces no longer a fitful feeling of alarm ... but an unbearable strain, more or less approaching panic...’<sup>146</sup>

Of course, this is very much the position that Portal had already taken with Bottomley, and was exactly in accord with Harris’s understanding of his directives, but it was not a position that the British government wanted to acknowledge openly.

Shortly afterwards, Spaight published a remarkable book analysing the bombing campaign; ‘Bombing Vindicated’. In it, he considered this domestic opposition;

‘Unfortunately, the German propagandists were able to count upon a certain amount of support in their campaign from within this country of free speech. That it was the support of only a tiny fraction of the population was shown when, on 29 April 1942, Mr Rhys Davies, a Pacifist Member of Parliament, questioned the Secretary of State for Air about the recent raid on Lubeck and implied in a supplementary question that the air offensive should be stopped. There was a resounding cheer throughout the House of Commons when Sir Archibald Sinclair replied: ‘The best way to prevent this destruction is to win the war as quickly as possible.’ A few weeks later, another Socialist Member, Mr RR Stokes, was asking about the recent ‘thousand-bomber’ raids and their utility.’<sup>147</sup>

Spaight virtually dismisses Davies and Stokes as a pacifist and socialist respectively and not representative of the population. But what is most interesting about his book for this study is that it exists at all.

The book is a well-informed and entirely sympathetic portrayal of the public bombing policy, associated with a successful campaign narrative. In effect, it addresses the opposition argument, in terms in which Ministers might not want to become embroiled; it is the government case by proxy. Spaight observes that:

‘What has really happened is that air power has killed absenteeism in war. ... We are all in the thick of the trouble now. Naturally, to those who have not grown accustomed to being no longer absentees it is nothing but an intrusion, a trespass, a violation, an outrage, when war thus invades their hearths and homes. It is more than that – it is an abomination, a needless cruelty, a grim and

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<sup>146</sup> BRITTAIN, V. 1944. *Seed of Chaos : What Mass Bombing Really Means*, London, New Vision Publishing Co. P22

<sup>147</sup> SPAIGHT, J. 1944. *Bombing Vindicated*, London, Geoffrey Bles. P34

mocking travesty of war, when bombs come crashing down on their houses, when people are killed in their sleep, when death and ruin overwhelm their world. This, they cry, is not war – it is murder. But it is war – the new kind of war. It is wrong, horrible, unendurable, but it was inevitable. It was inevitable that the air offensive against an enemy's source of armed strength should come and with it the incidental killing of non-combatants.<sup>148</sup>

This is what Harris had wanted Street to admit and Sinclair to announce, but he was not politically astute enough to recognise that the official position could never reflect this bleakly amoral position.

### **The lessons learned from the strategic bombing campaign**

In the event, predictions of the crushing moral effect of aerial bombardment were as overstated as the 1937 Times Guernica editorial had suggested; instead of Douhet's social breakdown, the populations of the cities that did endure persistent attacks drew together and perversely gathered strength in a phenomenon still known 70 years later as the spirit of the 'Blitz'. The German attacks of 1940-1941 never achieved the levels of destruction that the Royal Air Force would inflict two years later. Even the most destructive operations of the European war, the protracted attacks on Hamburg, Berlin and Dresden, did not realise Douhet's social breakdown. That said, immediate post-war analysis suggested that the effect on German morale of these devastating attacks had been significant;

'It's much blacker than Speer paints it,' [Erhard Milch, the State Secretary for Air] told the members of his ministry. 'If we get just five or six more attacks like these on Hamburg, the German people will just lay down their tools, however great their willpower.'<sup>149</sup>

The actual effect of the bombing campaign, as opposed to that perceived in the UK in 1946, is immaterial to this study, but Milch's observation was reported in time to inform the next iteration of strategic planning. Those making decisions about Britain's atomic weapon capabilities in the decade after the end of the bombing campaigns of the Second World War had all held senior positions during the Second World War. The lessons that they derived from that conflict would inevitably colour their thinking as they shaped atomic policy.

The British Authorities started the Second World War with an exaggerated fear of a German strategic bombing campaign and sought to avoid provoking it. That said,

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid. P117

<sup>149</sup> AIR DIVISION BAFO 1946. Report on German Flak Towers, Flak Disarmament Branch. TNA AIR 55/ 158.' Reported in LOWE, K. 2007. *Inferno: The Devastation of Hamburg 1943*. London: Penguin Group. Kindle Locations 3695-3699

this does not appear to me to be an early example of a coherent deterrence strategy. Although Attlee later considered that the 1930s 'strategic bombing had been hailed as the great deterrent to war and had failed,'<sup>150</sup> Trenchard, Baldwin and Halsbury were not considering deterrence by posing a capability to respond in kind; simply that attacks on cities were inevitable in future conflict and, in order to defeat an enemy, Britain must be able to inflict and survive such damage. Similarly, deterrence was not discussed in the Commons debate on Munich in September 1938 – the assumption was that war would inevitably entail bombing of cities. The RAF strategic bombing campaign was the manifestation of that thinking.

The capability offered by strategic bombing, realised much more by the RAF than by the Luftwaffe, pushed the boundaries of the laws and ethics of war – as the 1940 Daily Mirror headline suggested; Maybe Everybody is a Victim.<sup>151</sup>

Initially, the RAF campaign was limited by the inadequate preparations made between the wars. Having started with an exaggerated expectation of precision bombing of military targets, Cabinet accepted less discriminate bombing of areas in which military targets were situated and then specifically directed operations against the morale of the German civilian population. The issue of unintended civilian casualties caused by attacks on military targets forced consideration of the legitimacy of targets located within residential areas. The directives to Bomber Command were explicit – the primary objective of operations was to be focused on the morale of the enemy civilian population. Despite diversions into oil and other 'panacea' targets, this was essentially the policy until the end of the war. Ministers consistently denied this in Parliament and in public.

It is clear from the public interventions of religious leaders and the paucity of philosophical debate on the topic beforehand that ethical issues of proportionality and non-combatant immunity were novel, highly contentious and only marginally developed. An embryonic, but highly articulate and energetic opposition emerged during the war – not simple pacifism but a much more sophisticated opposition to the specifics of modern warfare. The men at the highest levels of government had to address these issues, in the context of a war of unprecedented potential which posed an existential threat to the UK. They chose to avoid the inevitably contentious and morale-sapping public debate about the difference between

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<sup>150</sup> BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2014. *The British Nuclear Experience: The Roles of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford, OUP. P18

<sup>151</sup> Daily Mirror 12 Sept 1940, quoted CONNELLY, M. 2002. The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany, 1939–45. *Contemporary British History*, 16, 39–48.

'unintended but inevitable casualties' and deliberate targeting of non-combatants. They clearly believed they had no option if they intended to continue to prosecute the war; they lied.

## **Chapter Five: From the Second World War to Continuous At Sea Deterrence**

If the early leaders of Britain's nuclear enterprise learnt anything from the experience of the Second World War, it was that 'total' war could threaten the whole fabric of the state and society. The previous chapter suggests that the importance of maintaining a plausible position of moral authority was considered critical in keeping public morale engaged in the war effort, even if the enemy engaged in immoral attacks on the British population. This moral authority was directly linked to the technical capabilities and strategies to be used; common ethical considerations would limit the extent of destruction acceptable to the public, even if such limits were detrimental to the war effort.

The wartime government had skirted around this issue; in 1945, Attlee's Government was faced with the significant challenge of developing weapons specifically designed to destroy entire cities, and strategies to use them, without alienating the public. How this was achieved is the subject of this chapter.

### **The genesis of the British atomic energy project**

In April 1937, opposition leader Clement Attlee requested the Foreign Secretary (Lord Halifax) to take immediate steps to address a protest to Franco and Hitler over the Guernica bombing.<sup>1</sup> Eight years later, as the Prime Minister of the newly elected Labour Government, Attlee was faced with leading the UK into the atomic age when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945 and the second on Nagasaki three days later. Japan unconditionally surrendered on 12th August 1945. Despite a thread of modern historiographical analysis that seeks to demonstrate that there were other factors which affected Japan's decision to surrender such as the Soviet invasion of Manchuria on 9th August 1945, for the victorious allies, there was no question that the atomic bombs had caused the capitulation.<sup>2</sup>

Attlee intuitively understood the central premise of deterrence. In August 1945, he wrote to the Cabinet;

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<sup>1</sup> HC Debate 28 April 1937. HANSARD vol 323 cc312-9.

<sup>2</sup> See; WILSON, W. 2008. The Myth of Nuclear Deterrence. *Nonproliferation review*, 15, 421-439. P422; WILSON, W. 2013. *Five Myths about Nuclear Weapons*, BOSTON, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. PP40-51; MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. PP129-131



'We recognised or some of us did before this war that bombing could only be answered by counter bombing. We were right ... The answer to an atomic bomb on London is an atomic bomb on another great city. ... Even the modern conception of war to which in my lifetime we have become accustomed is now completely out of date ... We should declare that this invention has made it essential to end wars. The new World Order must start now.'<sup>3</sup>

A month later he wrote to President Truman in much the same vein;

'The emergence of this new weapon has meant, taking account of its potentialities, not a quantitative but a qualitative change in the nature of warfare. .... I have so far heard no suggestion of any possible means of defence. The only deterrent is the possibility of the victim of such an attack being able to retort on the victor.'<sup>4</sup>

Attlee's insight was not initially shared by the Chiefs of Staff; in response to a Cabinet request to consider whether the '... introduction of atomic explosives open[s] up an era of destruction on a scale never before considered feasible, or is it merely an intensive development of the existing concept of war ...'<sup>5</sup> the Admiralty response to the Chiefs of Staff concluded that the atomic bomb would not on its own be decisive and that it was merely a bigger and better bomb.<sup>6</sup> This rather missed the point that Attlee seems to have intuitively grasped; one 'bigger and better bomb' carried by a single aircraft could inflict as many casualties as one of the massed raids of the latter part of the Second World War. The atomic bomb realised the vulnerability of cities and populations that had so agitated Attlee after Guernica; one bomber could always get through. Atomic weapons therefore provided an affordable means for a perpetual capability to threaten cities that otherwise would have required a war economy fully mobilised for production of huge numbers of heavy bombers.

Initially, Attlee considered international control of atomic energy essential to the maintenance of peace. He told Parliament; '... I declared the intention of His Majesty's Government to devote all their efforts to making the new discovery serve the purpose of world peace and to co-operate with others to that end.'<sup>7</sup> In a personal memo he subsequently drafted for the Cabinet, he enlarged on this; 'All nations must give up their dreams of realising some historic expansion at the expense of

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<sup>3</sup> ATTLEE, C. The Atomic Bomb: Memorandum by the Prime Minister. GEN 75/1, 28 Aug 1945. TNA CAB 130/3.

<sup>4</sup> ATTLEE, C. GEN 75/3 The Atomic Bomb: Letter from the Prime Minister to President Truman 25 September 1945. TNA CAB 130/3

<sup>5</sup> MOD ADMIRALTY 1945b. Director Plans 2 Sept 1945. TNA ADM 1/117259.

<sup>6</sup> MOD ADMIRALTY 1945a. ACNS(W) 15 Aug 1945. TNA ADM 1/117259.

<sup>7</sup> HC Debate 21 August 1945 Atomic Energy Committee HANSARD vol 413 cc442-443

their neighbours.<sup>8</sup> The UK and US conducted simultaneous negotiations throughout the autumn of 1945, looking both at international control, culminating in the Washington Declaration of 15 November 1945, and at cooperation in the construction of national stockpiles of atomic weapons, culminating in an Anglo-American Memorandum of Understanding on 16 November 1945.<sup>9</sup> In extreme secrecy, Attlee and a small Cabinet Committee (GEN 75) commissioned a report from the newly appointed Advisory Committee on Atomic Energy (ACAE), which initially reported that:

‘It is difficult to conceive of a system of international control without a system of international inspection and this has always been a point of special difficulty, both because its effectiveness is in likely to remain in doubt, and because of its unpalatability to national opinion. ... The political difficulties in the way of securing the adoption of any of the foregoing schemes and of assuring their efficacy are very great and might at first sight seem insurmountable. But the consequences of making no agreement at all are so grave not only for the security of all countries but for our present civilisation itself, that it appears imperative to devise a system of control.’<sup>10</sup>

GEN 75 met to discuss international control on average twice a week throughout October 1945 and the final ACAE report of 29 October 1945 concluded that international control was impracticable and that; ‘No international agreement, therefore, is likely to be successful which attempts to restrict the freedom of any of the major powers to produce atomic weapons. ....’ The report went on to recommend that; ‘The United Kingdom Government should itself undertake the production of atomic bombs as a means of self-defence as soon as possible.’<sup>11</sup> A week later GEN 75 agreed that;

‘It was useless to suppose that if a war once began, any agreement not to use the atomic bomb would be observed. The sanction proposed would never be effective in deterring a country which was in danger of being destroyed in a war begun without the use of atomic weapons. ... we must, therefore, base our foreign and

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<sup>8</sup> ATTLEE, C. The Atomic Bomb: Memorandum by the Prime Minister. GEN 75/1, 28 Aug 1945. TNA CAB 130/3.

<sup>9</sup> The ‘Groves-Anderson’ Memorandum, 16 November 1945 reproduced in GOWING, M. 1974. *Independence and deterrence: Britain and atomic energy 1945–1952*, vol. 1, London, Macmillan. P85

<sup>10</sup> ANDERSON, S. J. Advisory Committee on Atomic Energy; Memorandum on International Control of Atomic Energy 5 October 1945. TNA CAB 130/3.

<sup>11</sup> CABINET OFFICE GEN 75/10 International Control of Atomic Energy; Report by Officials 29 October 1945. TNA CAB 130/3.

defence policy on the assumption that if another war took place, these weapons would be used.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, GEN 75 initiated the British atomic energy programme. This conflict between what was clearly a genuine aspiration for a system of 'Utopian' international control, and the 'hard power' realism of development of a national atomic capability is present throughout Cabinet discussions of the early meetings of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission at which the Lilienthal Report and subsequent Baruch Plan for international control of atomic energy were discussed and rejected in 1946.<sup>13</sup> It has been an underlying tension in the formulation of British nuclear deterrence policy ever since.

This decision was not specifically to develop a British atomic weapon, however, merely to develop the facilities to produce the materials required, but the bomb was an implicit objective. Gowing describes the decision to embark on a British bomb project as 'axiomatic.'<sup>14</sup> These men simply assumed that the UK was a top-rank world power with significant strategic and commercial interests. The concurrent (non-atomic) meetings of the Defence Committee in 1946 indicate the breadth of the UK's interests at this time; from Greece and Denmark to Palestine and India, the UK had strategic interests across the World;<sup>15</sup> it was unthinkable that Britain should be without atomic weapons. The other common theme of those Defence Committee meetings was that of severe austerity and reductions in defence manpower, equipment and spending; with Bevin arguing that '... the proposed cuts in the armed forces faced him with grave difficulties in obtaining the support which he thought necessary as a backing to the conduct of the government's foreign policy.'<sup>16,17</sup>

Once the decision to proceed with a British atomic energy project had been made, the focus shifted to its management; Cabinet discussed national control of research and production, Ministerial responsibility, the creation of the appropriate advisory bodies and the executive control of the research, even the site of the proposed

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<sup>12</sup> CABINET OFFICE GEN 75/7th Meeting: Note of a Meeting of Ministers held at No 10 Downing St on Thursday 1 November 1945. TNA CAB 130/2.

<sup>13</sup> CABINET OFFICE GEN 75/37 International Control of Atomic Energy: the United States and Soviet Proposals 4 July 1946. TNA CAB 130/3. and; CABINET OFFICE Atomic Energy Commission of the United Nations; Second Meeting; Verbatim Record 19 June 1946. TNA CAB 130/3.

<sup>14</sup> GOWING, M. 1987. *How Nuclear Power Began*. Southampton. P20

<sup>15</sup> CABINET OFFICE DO(46) 17th Meeting Cabinet Defence Committee Minutes of a Meeting held at No 10 Downing St on Monday 27th May 1946. TNA CAB 131/1.

<sup>16</sup> CABINET OFFICE DO(46) 5th Meeting Cabinet Defence Committee Minutes of a Meeting held at No 10 Downing St on Friday 15th Feb 1946. TNA CAB 131/1.

<sup>17</sup> See also GOLDBERG, A. 1964a. The Atomic Origins of the British Nuclear Deterrent. *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 40, 409-429. P427

research establishment and its organization and financial structure. Privately, Attlee subsequently explained that he viewed a British bomb as;

‘...essential. We had to hold up our position vis-à-vis the Americans. We couldn’t allow ourselves to be wholly in their hands and their position wasn’t awfully clear always ... we had to bear in mind that there was always the possibility of their withdrawing and becoming isolationist once again. The manufacture of a British bomb was therefore at that stage essential to our defence.’<sup>18</sup>

In January 1946, the team to lead the development of a UK weapon was appointed – Air Chief Marshal Portal was to be the ‘Controller of Production Atomic Energy’ in overall charge of developing the project; Christopher Hinton (an ICI specialist in munitions production) in charge of the construction of the ‘pile’ and; John Cockcroft (scientist and engineer) as the Director of the Atomic Energy Research Establishment. Portal’s initial report to GEN 163 (a smaller group of Ministers than even Gen 75, which did not include either Dalton (Chancellor) or Cripps (President of the Board of Trade)) in January 1947 recommended that;

‘... a decision is required about the development of atomic weapons in this country. The Service Departments are beginning to move in the matter and certain sections of the Press are showing interest in it.’<sup>19</sup>

Portal’s paper went on to offer three options; do nothing, proceed within legacy procurement arrangements, or design a specific structure for the design and development of atomic weapons. The paper’s conclusions were couched in terms to encourage the latter, especially in terms of the ability to maintain secrecy. GEN 163 formally agreed the development of a British atomic bomb, but merely reflected the growing consensus among ministers and officials;

‘This consensus was largely unspoken, but in Whitehall there was hardly a single dissenter. Attlee, Bevin, Portal, the Chiefs of Staff, Chadwick and many others were of one mind. Churchill too, although he was not consulted, had made no secret that this was his view.’<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, GEN 163 also agreed the structure of the organization to build the bomb. Security was to be draconian and Hinton’s organization, responsible for the production of the radioactive core of the weapon, was not even made aware of the

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in WILLIAMS, F. 1962. *Twilight of Empire; Memoirs of Prime Minister Clement Attlee*, New York, A S Barnes & Co. pp118-119

<sup>19</sup> Note by the Controller of production of Atomic Energy at the Confidential Annex to; CABINET OFFICE GEN 163/1st Meeting Note of a Meeting of Ministers held at No10 Downing St on Wednesday 8th January 1947. TNA CAB 130/16.

<sup>20</sup> CATHCART, B. 1994. *Test of Greatness: Britain's Struggle for the Atomic Bomb*. 2016 Electronic Endeavour Press ed. UK: Endeavour Press. Kindle Location 519

major bomb project (High Explosive Research) set up under William Penney (a physicist recently returned from the USA). Penney's presence in the Armaments Research Division was a cause for some press speculation, with Chapman Pincher wondering if his appointment heralded the start of the British atomic weapon development programme.<sup>21</sup> Secrecy was maintained within the respective official arms of the project through the Official Secrets Act, and Portal's compartmentalization of the various activities. Media interest was discouraged through the use of the D (Discretion) Notice system.

The D-Notice system has no statutory basis and was developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in order to prevent the press from publishing information which might be of value to a future enemy; it has been the 'preferred interface of UK Government and Media'<sup>22</sup> and has proven a successful for over 100 years and persists today. D-Notice 25 inhibited publication of any articles or broadcasts on British atomic weapon activities from 1945 until its replacement in 1971 by a standing D-Notice which in turn was replaced in 2000 by Defence Advisory (DA) Notice 02;

'It is requested that disclosure or publication of highly classified information about nuclear and non-nuclear defence equipment or equipment ... should not be made without first seeking advice. ... Release of highly classified operational plans and security arrangements could potentially jeopardise the safety and security of our nuclear forces and reduce their deterrent value.'<sup>23</sup>

Famously reticent at the best of times, Attlee actively minimised discussion of a British atomic bomb, but that was equally true of all aspects of defence; in the Lords' discussion of the 1948 Defence White Paper, Viscount Bridgeman lamented; 'Our only information is still derived from the New Statesman and Nation and, so far as I understand, has not been confirmed or denied, either here or in another place.'<sup>24</sup> There was no public engagement, nor was the wider Cabinet informed. In a manner that was to become typical of the release of British atomic project information, Cabinet and the Commons were informed of the existence of a British project later in 1948, not because they were democratically elected representatives with a right to know and a duty to oversee, but because there were concerns that there might be a leak and they would find out by some other route.

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<sup>21</sup> PINCHER, C. 1948. *Into the Atomic Age*, London, Hutchinson & Co. p104

<sup>22</sup> WILKINSON, N. 2011. National Security, Secrecy and the Media - A British View. In: MARET, S. (ed.) *Government Secrecy*. Bingley UK: Emerald Books. pp133-136

<sup>23</sup> UK GOVT DSMA Notice 02: Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Weapons and Equipment. Defence and Security Media Advisory (DSMA) website: UK Government.

<sup>24</sup> HL Debate 17 March 1948. HANSARD vol 154 cc863-926.

In the Commons debate on the Defence White Paper in March 1948, one MP had pointed out the inconsistency in making the strategic bomber force the major striking force, calling it ‘...a most wasteful force in terms of economic and industrial work, and is also a most expensive and an inefficient force for doing damage to the enemy...’<sup>25</sup> However, he had failed to consider his question holistically and what might make such a force capable of doing damage to an enemy, such as atomic bombs. Commander Noble (MP) stated that ‘I believe the general public to be a bit ostrich-minded on the subject of atomic warfare.’ He then went on to reflect that ‘...the prospect of reducing the differences on the Atomic Energy Commission of the United Nations seemed definitely worse than a year ago... feel the time has come, or is coming, when the Prime Minister, or perhaps the Foreign Secretary, should tell us exactly how we stand.’ Noble continued; ‘I wonder how many of us ... asked ourselves how we should defend these islands and the Commonwealth in the event of atomic war?’<sup>26</sup> Even during these debates, the evidence that the UK was developing an atomic bomb capability was mounting, but was not apparently connected with the concept of a British deterrent. Attlee responded only to the points on international control and blithely ignored any hint of a British atomic bomb project and the defence implications of atomic warfare.

In the event, the Defence Minister, AV Alexander announced in a response to a question about development of the most modern weapons two months later; ‘... all types of modern weapons, including atomic weapons, are being developed.’<sup>27</sup> Press coverage of the announcement was muted, hardly surprising since the D-Notice Committee had spent much of the previous meeting agreeing the terms of the new D-Notice 25 that would cover ‘Location and progress of work UK on development and production of atomic weapons, their design, size and other details, materials used, storage locations, identification of individuals with work on atomic weapons’<sup>28</sup>. The government sent the D-Notice to the newspaper editors the day before Alexander’s statement.

In the absence of an official atomic narrative, the British public and media had simply been using their imagination, fuelled by both fact (mostly from American atomic literature) and fiction.

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<sup>25</sup> HC Debate 1 March 1948 Defence. HANSARD vol448 c87-160. Col 87

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. col 109-110

<sup>27</sup> HC Debate 12 May 1948 HANSARD vol 450 c2117.

<sup>28</sup> WILKINSON, N. 2009. *Secrecy and the Media; the Official History of the United Kingdom's D-NOTICE SYSTEM*, Abingdon, Routledge. P223

## The public atomic narrative

Early in 1946, Father Siemes's eyewitness account of the aftermath of the attack on Hiroshima was published in the *Irish Monthly*. It was a miserably objective account of destruction, mass-selfishness and, occasionally, individual altruism of survivors. It recounted some lucky stories but graphically described a society destroyed to extent that civilised behaviour was almost eradicated within days, and a near-immediate reversion to a state of nature followed;<sup>29</sup>

‘Thousands of wounded who died later could doubtless have been saved if they had received proper treatment and care, but rescue work in a catastrophe of this magnitude had not been envisaged; since the whole city had been knocked out at a blow.’<sup>30</sup>

It was followed in August 1946 with the publication of Hersey's book ‘Hiroshima’ in a dedicated issue of the ‘*New Yorker*’; ‘The response was sensational and the text was republished in full by several newspapers, ABC radio broadcast a reading of the entire text over four nights, and the book version of the text became an immediate best seller.’<sup>31</sup>

It was less of a sensation in the UK; the *Guardian* carried a description of the *New Yorker* story on 3rd September, concluding that ‘One hopes that before long all over here, and in the world generally, will have the opportunity to read these pages. Man has either to abolish war or to accept Hiroshima's fate for his own city in the future.’<sup>32</sup> The BBC broadcast a reading of the text in four episodes on the Third Programme on the evenings of the week of 14 October 1946. The *Observer's* critic, WE Williams, complained that the programme;

‘... proved heavy going. In print [Hersey's] narrative manages to conceal some of its weaknesses – its redundancies of testimony for instance and its excessive poverty of language. The reader's eye, adjusting the mind to such deficiencies, can select what is to be skimmed and what is to be pondered. But a reading aloud, even by six voices, denies us this selectivity ... I thought the wireless version of ‘Hiroshima’ inordinately long-drawn-out.’<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> SIEMES, P. T. 1946a. The Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima: An Eye-Witness Account. *The Irish Monthly*, 74, 93-104.

<sup>30</sup> SIEMES, P. T. 1946b. The Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima: An Eye-Witness Account (Continued). *The Irish Monthly*, 74, 148-154. P151

<sup>31</sup> SHARP, P. 2000. From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's "Hiroshima". *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46, 434-452. P434

<sup>32</sup> GUARDIAN. Hiroshima. 3 September 1946, p.4 col 1.

<sup>33</sup> OBSERVER. Travelling Third - Marathon. *Observer*, 20 October 1946, p.2.

A month later, he complained that; 'Matters of immense topical interest do not necessarily make good radio.'<sup>34</sup> It appears that the Observer, although it did provide a critique on contemporary coverage of atomic issues, was more interested in style than substance. 'Hiroshima' was repeated in one broadcast on the BBC Light Programme on 30 November. Penguin published the British edition of Hersey's book in November 1946, but to considerably less popular reaction than in the USA.

The dichotomy between the bombing of Hiroshima and the results of the Nuremberg trials, which concluded in August 1946, was not lost on some of the public who wondered how;

'... the interests of peace or justice ... could ever be served by the massacre, in circumstances of unspeakable horror, of tens of thousands of defenceless women and children? ... We are ... continually being told that it is no defence of the soldiers and sailors at Nuremberg that they were merely obeying orders; in fact that they should have disobeyed orders which were clearly opposed to humanity and the laws of war. What then about the airmen who were ordered to drop this token of progress on the nurseries and maternity homes of Hiroshima?'<sup>35</sup>

These were the same sort of strongly emotive binary moral terms in which in parliament in 1939 Lords Mottistone and Strabolgi and, in 1917 Mr Molteno, had opposed strategic bombing or reprisals against civil populations, and similarly difficult to refute without a complex ethical debate centering on deontological and consequentialist precepts. After the experiences of the strategic bombing campaign of the Second World War, this was not a debate in which Attlee's government was prepared to enter in 1946.

### **Early days of the British nuclear enterprise**

At the end of the Second World War, Britain's nuclear expertise had resided almost exclusively inside the Manhattan Project in the USA. With the 1946 McMahon Act, the US almost immediately inhibited any prospect of information or technology sharing with others, including any further exchange with those who had contributed to the wartime atomic bomb project.<sup>36</sup> There was a significant shortage of specialist

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<sup>34</sup> OBSERVER. The Atom on the Air. 10 November 1946, p.2.

<sup>35</sup> TIMES. Atomic Bombs. 26 September 1946.

<sup>36</sup> The history of how and why this cooperation was withdrawn, and then reinstated nine years later is not directly pertinent to this thesis. The relevant implications will be considered, but the detail is very comprehensively addressed in BAYLIS, J. 1995. *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. especially chapter 2 and; GOWING, M. 1974. *Independence and deterrence: Britain and atomic energy 1945-1952*, vol. 1, London, Macmillan.



scientists and engineers; the British atomic projects were competing against each other in the same pool with all other elements of defence research, and those who might have been available were put off by the obsessive security restrictions. This secrecy exacerbated further the bureaucratic tensions inherent in the structure that had been established by Portal which straddled both the Ministry of Defence (from whom the atomic bomb project was completely hidden) and the Ministry of Supply, for whom Portal technically worked, although he reported directly to the Prime Minister.<sup>37</sup> Penney struggled even to recruit draughtsmen and secretaries.<sup>38</sup> To say that the development of the British atomic bomb had been achieved on a shoestring budget would be to assign a rather sanguine interpretation of the resilience of the project. The casting of the plutonium core of the bomb to be tested at Monte Bello in 1952 was conducted by the project director who had never cast anything, because his specialist had caught the wrong train and they could not wait for him to arrive.<sup>39</sup>

When the time came to test the British atomic bomb, Churchill (once again Prime Minister) was typically adamant about the need for close control of all information released:

‘The Prime Minister said that he would personally approve any communiques or statements which it was desired to issue to the Press. Apart from these, nothing whatever should be said to the Press and nobody should be given any discretion at all to make any statement of any kind. In matters of this kind the less said the better, and all enquiries for further information should be met with a blank refusal.’<sup>40</sup>

A government statement was issued in February 1952, only once the convoy of vessels involved in the test had departed the UK. The statement simply said that the UK would test an atomic bomb at some point that year, and that the test would be in Australia. The vacuum in public information had led to a flurry of speculation, particularly in the foreign press which was unencumbered by the D-Notice system.

A bomb, however, is only one element of a system; it requires delivery platforms, and the personnel to man them. While the decision was being made to pursue a British atomic weapon, the only readily available delivery platform options were

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<sup>37</sup> BAYLIS, J. 1995. *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. Ch2

<sup>38</sup> PENNEY, W. Unreferenced handwritten notes to Portal on High Explosive Research project 1946-47. TNA AB16/1905

<sup>39</sup> CATHCART, B. 1994. *Test of Greatness: Britain's Struggle for the Atomic Bomb*. 2016 Electronic Endeavour Press ed. UK: Endeavour Press. Kindle location 2594-2599

<sup>40</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street on Thursday 24th April 1952. TNA ADM 116/6087.

heavy bomber aircraft. Air Staff Operational Requirement OR229 for a replacement for the Lancaster and Lincoln bombers was placed by the RAF in early 1947, with a due delivery date of 1957. 'A medium range bomber landplane capable of carrying one 10,000 lb (4,500 kg) bomb to a target 1,500 nautical miles (1,700 mi; 2,800 km) from a base which may be anywhere in the world.'<sup>41</sup> Although a capability to deliver an atomic bomb was not specified in the design, it was implicit.<sup>42</sup> As above, the usually perspicacious Commons do not seem to have made the connection between the small production run of OR229 and atomic weapons.

The austerity that afflicted the other branches of the armed forces at this time limited development and production of these aircraft, and it was 1957 before the first fully operational combination of the first UK atomic bomb (Blue Danube) and Valiant aircraft of 138 Squadron arrived at RAF Wittering, still in extreme secrecy. By that stage however, technology had advanced; the missile rendered the bomber obsolescent as a single strategic deterrence delivery platform, and in October 1957 the launch of Sputnik very publicly made the point to the West. It was this remorseless technological advance, in particular the advent of the hydrogen bomb and its seemingly limitless destructive potential that energised a coherent opposition.

The political decision making which led to the British hydrogen bomb project was conducted in complete secrecy, with Churchill establishing his own reduced Cabinet Committee (GEN 465) to discuss the factors and options. The Committee agreed that:

'...we should need to get clear the fundamental issues of foreign policy and strategy which were raised by the latest developments ... [including] in the light of the new information about the hydrogen bomb, the following points:-

- (i) The likelihood of war.
- (ii) The form which war was most likely to take if it came.
- (iii) the changes which would need to be made in the pattern of our defence arrangements, active and passive, in order to adjust them to meet the most likely contingency.

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<sup>41</sup> AIR STAFF Air Staff Operational Requirement OR229 TNA AIR20/2240.

<sup>42</sup> GOLDBERG, A. 1964b. The Military Origins of the British Nuclear Deterrent. *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 40, 600-618. p606

(iv) The extent to which we should ensure against the possibility that war might take some other form than that which now seemed most likely.<sup>43</sup>

In April 1954, the Committee agreed that '... Cabinet should at an early date consider whether the United Kingdom should embark on a programme of research, development and production of hydrogen bombs.'<sup>44</sup> In the subsequent Cabinet Committee on Defence Policy (DPC; a slightly larger forum, but still not the full Cabinet) in May 1954, discussion centred on defence expenditure and discussed, against an accepted demand for £200M pa reductions in defence expenditure, the Hydrogen bomb project expenditure. Churchill summed up:

'... influence depended on possession of force. If the United States were tempted to undertake a forestalling war, we could not hope to remain neutral. ... If however we were able to show that in a few years' time we should be possessed of great offensive power, and that we should be ready to take our part in a world struggle, he thought it would not be impossible to reconcile reductions in defence expenditure with the maintenance of our influence in world councils.'<sup>45</sup>

Cabinet agreed on 22 March 1954 that;

'(a) A general statement on the strategic importance of the hydrogen bomb would certainly provoke a demand for a full debate. (b) It was desirable that, at the appropriate moment, the public should be made aware of the full implications of the development of the hydrogen bomb. But the timing of this disclosure should be carefully judged.'<sup>46</sup>

Although Cabinet was discussing hydrogen bomb issues in extreme secrecy, in March 1954 the US publicly announced the detonation of the first weaponized hydrogen bomb, the Castle Bravo test.<sup>47</sup> The announcement, accompanied with graphic photographs of the first hydrogen bomb test which had been conducted in 1952, caused an upsurge of interest in nuclear weapons. The Daily Mirror carried a front page photograph of the explosion under the headline 'The Monster'. On the centre pages the headline was; 'The Horror Bomb' and the leader read;

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<sup>43</sup> CABINET OFFICE Note of a Meeting in the Cabinet Office GEN 465 12 Mar 1954. TNA CAB 130/101.

<sup>44</sup> CABINET OFFICE Note of a meeting of Ministers GEN 464 13 Apr 1954. TNA CAB 130/101.

<sup>45</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a meeting of the Committee on Defence Policy DP(54) 2nd Meeting 19 May 1954. TNA CAB 134/808.

<sup>46</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet 22 Mar 54. TNA CAB 128/27/21.

<sup>47</sup> A hydrogen bomb uses nuclear fusion, rather than the fission used by atomic bomb. This releases considerably more energy, and uses a fission device simply as the 'primer' for the fusion reaction. The first fusion explosion had been a test of a particular design in 1952, but the Castle Bravo test was a fully weaponised device, ready to use as a bomb.

‘... The ball of death, poised on a stem of fire, has thrust through the clouds to 40,000ft - half as high again as Everest, the world’s highest mountain.’ It continued; ‘... there was left a crater three and a half miles across and 175ft deep, big enough to hold a seventeen storey building. Everything within three miles of the explosion was completely wiped out. Damage was ‘moderate’ up to seven miles away. ‘Light’ damage was recorded up to ten miles. ... Scientists say that a bomb detonated 2000ft above a city would create a much greater area of total damage..’<sup>48</sup>

The initiative for proactive engagement over a public announcement had been lost. Crossman (Labour MP and diarist) noted on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1954, ‘Actually of course the American bomb has been manufactured since 1950 and the announcement that the Russians had detonated theirs occurred on August 8<sup>th</sup> last year. But it’s only during these last ten days that the country has become H-bomb conscious...’<sup>49</sup> Macmillan noted that; ‘It is obvious that there is tremendous interest, almost panic, in many parts of the world, about the Hydrogen Bomb.’<sup>50</sup> This was the only time prior to 2017 that the Doomsday Clock had been advanced to 2 ½ minutes to midnight.<sup>51</sup>

Under the headline ‘Churchill Confesses’ the Daily Mirror pilloried Churchill’s prior UK knowledge of the hydrogen bomb tests and reported that; ‘... last night about a hundred [Labour MPs] put their names to a motion demanding government steps to OUTLAW THE BOMB and to BAN FURTHER EXPLOSIONS’ and asserted that there were;

‘... murmurs of protest from the Labour side when Sir Winston replied that if such a request would lead to these results, we ought to be careful about asking the question.’<sup>52</sup>

The Labour Party called an adjournment debate in Parliament, ostensibly to support an immediate summit with the UK, USA and USSR to discuss means to control hydrogen bomb development, and Attlee provided a generous and bi-partisan speech which was well-received by the House, albeit challenging the assumption that the hydrogen bomb was a deterrent to war on the basis it was too powerful.

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<sup>48</sup> DAILY MIRROR. The Monster. 2 April 1954, p.7-8. p8

<sup>49</sup> CROSSMAN, R. 1981. *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, London, Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape. P303

<sup>50</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2012. *The Macmillan Diaries; The Cabinet Years 1950-1957*, London, Pan. P303

<sup>51</sup> BRONSON, R. 2017. *It is two and a half minutes to midnight; 2017 Doomsday Clock Statement* [Online]. Chicago: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Available: <http://thebulletin.org/sites/default/files/Final%202017%20Clock%20Statement.pdf> [Accessed 27 January 2017].

<sup>52</sup> DAILY MIRROR. Churchill Confesses. 31 Mar 1954, p.1.

But Churchill resorted to a rather churlish attack on Labour's record. Macmillan noted;

'The press has been bad - though not quite as bad as I feared. The D Telegraph loyal; the Times insufferably pontifical; the Express and Mail in full support; the Chronicle and M Guardian fair; the Daily Mirror vile. Yet with all the criticism, I feel that the main strategic purpose has been secured.'<sup>53</sup>

In May, the Chiefs of Staff reported to the DPC that;

'...the world situation has been completely altered by recent progress in the development of nuclear weapons. ... A provisional estimate of the effect of 10 bombs dropped one each on 10 selected cities in the United Kingdom indicates that, ... the death roll would be [between] 5 millions [and] ... 12 millions ... Our defence system within the foreseeable future will not be able to provide the complete protection necessary against air attack employing weapons of mass destruction. ... We must be prepared for the United Kingdom to receive such damage from nuclear bombardment in the opening days of a war that it cannot continue to function as a main support area.'<sup>54</sup>

It was July before Churchill actually informed the full Cabinet that Britain had already embarked on the development of the hydrogen bomb; the reaction of the Cabinet was to walk out:

'[Churchill] told us that the decision had been made to make the hydrogen bomb in England and the preliminaries were in hand. Harry Crookshank at once made a most vigorous protest at such a momentous decision being communicated to the Cabinet in so cavalier a way, and started to walk out of the room. We all did the same and the Cabinet broke up - if not in disorder - in a somewhat ragged fashion.'<sup>55</sup>

Cabinet reconvened the next day and the minutes record that; 'The Cabinet resumed their discussion of the question whether our atomic weapons programme should be adjusted as to allow for the production of thermo-nuclear bombs in this country.'<sup>56</sup> Macmillan's diary records;

'We began on the Hydrogen Bomb. PM said that only the first preliminaries were decided. It was, we recognised, a hideous

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<sup>53</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2012. *The Macmillan Diaries; The Cabinet Years 1950-1957*, London, Pan.p305

<sup>54</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff for the Defence Policy Committee and Cabinet: United Kingdom Defence Policy 31 May 1954. TNA CAB 129/69. Paragraphs 3, 5 and 21

<sup>55</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2012. *The Macmillan Diaries; The Cabinet Years 1950-1957*, London, Pan. pp327-328

<sup>56</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet 8 Jul 54. TNA CAB 128/27/48.

decision. ... A short but valuable discussion followed.<sup>57</sup>

The main discussion points raised included;

‘... additional financial commitment ... Was it morally right that we should manufacture weapons with this vast destructive power? There was no doubt that a decision to make hydrogen bombs would offend the conscience of substantial numbers of people in this country. ... The point was again made that there was no difference in kind between atomic and thermo-nuclear weapons; and that, in so far as any moral principle was involved, it had already been breached by the decision of the Labour Government to make the atomic bomb. It was also argued that the moral issue would arise, not so much on the production of those weapons, but on the decision to use them: ... if we were ready to accept the protection offered by United States use of thermo-nuclear weapons, no greater moral wrong was involved in making them ourselves.

... No country could claim to be a leading military Power unless it possessed the most up-to-date weapons; and the fact must be faced that, unless we possessed thermo-nuclear weapons, we should lose our influence and standing in world affairs.

... Doubt was expressed about the feasibility of keeping secret, for any length of time, a decision to manufacture thermo-nuclear weapons in this country. It was therefore suggested that thought should be given to the question of how a decision to manufacture these weapons should be justified to public opinion in this country and abroad.’<sup>58</sup>

These key questions would inform policy development for the remainder of the 1950s. The defence budget was under perpetual strain, as described above, and the cost of nuclear weapon development has been a significant factor and point for debate ever since. The moral question was raised formally in Cabinet for the first time, although clearly the Ministers and officials felt it keenly. Indeed, the Cabinet Secretary’s notes of the meeting record; ‘PM: Must take a decision in principle; not necessarily today; doesn’t depend on technical detail; mainly a moral question.’<sup>59</sup> Macmillan had noted in his diary that; ‘... Churchill broods a good deal about the atomic and hydrogen bomb. The destructive power of the latter is frightful. All London in one night.’<sup>60</sup> This moral reasoning appears to have been deeply personal

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<sup>57</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2012. *The Macmillan Diaries; The Cabinet Years 1950-1957*, London, Pan. p328

<sup>58</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet 8 Jul 54. TNA CAB 128/27/48.

<sup>59</sup> Norman Brook’s handwritten notes of Cabinet 8 July 1954; TNA CAB 128/27/48

<sup>60</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2012. *The Macmillan Diaries; The Cabinet Years 1950-1957*, London, Pan. P297

and not deliberately informed through any engagement with independent philosophers.

The implications for British influence in the World were clearly articulated, and sustained the belief that nuclear weapons conferred status that would otherwise be denied to the UK. The Chiefs of Staff reported;

‘The danger that the United States might succumb to the temptation of precipitating a ‘forestalling’ war cannot be disregarded. In view of the vulnerability of the United Kingdom we must use all our influence to prevent this;’<sup>61</sup>

This is a clear indication of the genuinely strategic implications of this oft-derided motive for an independent British nuclear deterrent.

The Cabinet endorsed the plan to continue development of an independent British hydrogen bomb and the British project was announced to the House in March 1955. In the meantime, work had begun to address some of the issues raised by the hydrogen bomb threat. The COS report in May had highlighted that;

‘A small number of the latest nuclear weapons can achieve a devastating effect ... Moreover, during the next decade, means of delivery against which there is no foreseeable defence will be developed. These two factors are creating a new military situation which will reduce progressively the value of certain conventional war preparations and weapons.’<sup>62</sup>

Informed by this paper, the DPC reviewed the strategic assumptions underlying the current defence policy and the scale and pattern of military (and civil) defence programmes. The DPC concluded ‘Our primary aim must be to prevent a major war. To that end we must strengthen our position and influence as a world Power and maintain and consolidate our alliance with the United States.’<sup>63</sup>

To that end, the DPC proposed 15% cuts to the army and navy, and changes to the air defence structure of the RAF. It then continued:

‘The policy outlined in this report will clearly need most careful presentation to the public. Many people are preoccupied with the destructive power of the latest atomic weapons. Fewer perhaps have yet recognised that the development of these weapons may have made major war less likely. The public as a whole will therefore find it difficult to understand why, as the destructive power of air attack

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<sup>61</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff for the Defence Policy Committee and Cabinet: United Kingdom Defence Policy 31 May 1954. TNA CAB 129/69. paragraph 23

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. paragraph 32

<sup>63</sup> CABINET OFFICE Cabinet Report by the Committee on Defence Policy 27 July 1954. TNA CAB 129-69-0050.

increases, we propose to cut down our fighter and anti-aircraft defences and reduce the scale of our expenditure on Civil Defence. These and other changes recommended in this report certainly could not be defended in isolation. Public acceptance of them can only be secured if they are presented as parts of a coherent plan based on the recognition that no purely defensive policy could ensure the safety of these islands and those who live in them and that the main weight of our defence effort must now be concentrated on building up the deterrent strength which will prevent the outbreak of a major war.<sup>64</sup>

The report could not have been more explicit on the need for a coherent public engagement plan and it proposed a special Defence White Paper in the autumn of 1954 in order to present a full statement of the new defence policy as a whole.

The DPC report also highlighted the issues associated with civil defence in the event of a nuclear attack. It pointed out that;

'We cannot assume that it will be possible to maintain central government control from London ... [we] should devise alternative means of maintaining the essential machinery of government with maximum flexibility and devolution ... It will not be realistic to attempt to provide shelter for the civil population ... except for certain priority classes, no considerable section of the population could be moved from the main target areas ... plans should aim at maintaining skeleton services without relying on the repair of the extensive damage that must be expected ...'<sup>65</sup>

The Joint Intelligence Committee and GEN 465, under the guidance of the Cabinet Secretary, commissioned a study to consider the effects of a nuclear attack on the UK, a requirement that was endorsed by Macmillan and Churchill in December 1954.<sup>66</sup>

This report (known after its author as the Strath Report), painted a bleak picture of the British state after a nuclear attack:

'In some parts of the country, particularly if several bombs fell in the same area, there might be complete chaos for a time and civil control would collapse. In such circumstances the local military commander would have to be prepared to take over from the civil authority responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and for the administration of government. He would, if called upon, exercise his existing common-law powers to take whatever steps, however drastic, he considered necessary to restore order. He would have to direct the operations of various civil agencies, including the police, the civil defence services and the fire service. In areas less badly hit the civil

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. paragraph 19

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Annex II

<sup>66</sup> MOD Memorandum Macmillan (MOD) to Churchill (Prime Minister) 8 Dec 1954. TNA DEFE 13/45.



authorities might still be able to retain control but only with the support of the armed services.<sup>67</sup>

The importance of this report for Defence Planning is difficult to over-emphasise. The phenomenon of the failure of civil society was abbreviated to 'breakdown' and became the object of very highly classified study in itself:

'...breakdown might be defined as occurring when the government of a country is no longer able to ensure that its orders are carried out. This state of affairs could come about through breakdown of the machinery of control ... or through through the breakdown of morale.'<sup>68</sup>

At the very highest levels of discretion and secrecy, it informed decision-making in Whitehall, but was never disseminated further. Despite the very clear DPC recommendation, no public engagement was undertaken. In particular, the Strath report was not distributed to the Local Authorities where it was assumed that it would stimulate questions about shelter policy and evacuation, which the government was ill-equipped to answer.<sup>69</sup> Defence planning continued to develop nuclear deterrence as the core of British defence policy, culminating in the Sandys Defence review of 1957. The Strath Report, which in effect, went underground in Whitehall, drove expenditure away from civil defence - what was the point? - and was very influential for decades to come. As described above, the issues Strath had described so graphically were central to Peter Watkins's film *The War Game* a decade later, but remained a truly wicked issue for government. The Thatcher government was to run afoul of the exactly those issues nearly 30 years later; and to a very great extent, they remain pertinent today.

### **Early Opposition**

There had been 'peace' movements in Britain since the end of the First World War. They tended to be small and regional but came together in their opposition to the strategic bombing campaign of 1943-45. Although the post-war Labour Party in government had commissioned the British atomic energy project, it was fundamentally split on the issue of atomic weapons, a division that surfaced as one of a number of issues which became characterised by the Bevanite/ Gaitskellite

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<sup>67</sup> CABINET OFFICE 1955. D(55)17 The Defence Implications of Fall Out from a Hydrogen Bomb (The Strath Report). TNA CAB 21-4054.

<sup>68</sup> ANSTEY, A. SG(60)35 Note on the Concept and Definitions of Breakdown 10 June 1960. TNA DEFE 10/402.

<sup>69</sup> CABINET OFFICE Unreferenced memorandum Monckton (Cabinet Office) Chilvers (MOD) 11 Jun 56. TNA CAB 21-4054.

divide after the party's defeat in the general Election of 1951.<sup>70</sup> The Peace Pledge Union (PPU) established a non-violence commission 'to study and discuss the possibility of direct action to seek withdrawal of American forces, stoppage of the manufacture of atomic weapons in Britain, withdrawal of Britain from NATO, and disbandment of the British Armed Forces.'<sup>71</sup> Although the PPU itself achieved little public traction, a number of these groups started to cooperate and the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests (NCANWT) managed to draw together a number of regional groups opposed to nuclear testing. Opposition within Parliament to manufacture and possession of atomic weapons was not really organised until the debate about the British hydrogen bomb in 1954 which led to the Hydrogen Bomb Committee:

'This was not specifically unilateralist; it was an attempt to see nuclear weapons as a problem of foreign policy. ... It later led to CND, however and at that time I felt that British renunciation of nuclear weapons would not of itself contribute to the solution of the problem.'<sup>72</sup>

This movement was lent momentum by the Suez Crisis and the invasion of Hungary, and it was given specific focus by the prevalence of nuclear weapons in the defence policy announced in the Sandys Defence Review of 1957. The Labour Party struggled to define its position on atomic weapons. Bevan, a committed campaigner for unilateral disarmament, sponsored a motion at the 1957 Labour Party Conference calling for unilateral action to end the British atomic weapons programme. In the event however, in a now infamous *volte-face*, when it came to the conference, he actually said:

'I know that you are deeply convinced that the action you suggest is the most effective way of influencing international affairs. I am deeply convinced that you are wrong. It is therefore not a question of who is in favour of the hydrogen bomb, but a question of what is the most effective way of getting the damn thing destroyed. It is the most difficult of all problems facing mankind. But if you carry this resolution and follow out all its implications and do not run away from it you will send a Foreign Secretary, whoever he may be, naked into the conference chamber. Able to preach sermons of course; he could make good sermons. But action of that sort is not

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<sup>70</sup> TAYLOR, R. & PRITCHARD, C. 1980. *The Protest Makers; The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-1965, Twenty Years On*, Oxford, Pergamon. P2; BENN, T. *The Benn Diaries: 1940-1990*. Kindle ed.: Arrow Books. Location 1191-1193 and; CROSSMAN, R. 1981. *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, London, Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape. p387

<sup>71</sup> TAYLOR, R. & PRITCHARD, C. 1980. *The Protest Makers; The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-1965, Twenty Years On*, Oxford, Pergamon. P4

<sup>72</sup> BENN, T. 1982. *Parliament, People and Power; Agenda for a Free Society*, London, Verso. P4

necessarily the way in which you take the menace of this bomb from the world ...<sup>73</sup>

Bevan's motives remain the stuff of historiographical debate. In the event, 'it was his ghost which would continually return to haunt the relationship between Labour and CND throughout the next thirty years...'<sup>74</sup>

The day after Bevan's speech, the USSR launched Sputnik 1, demonstrating missile technology that almost instantly made Britain's bomber-based atomic deterrent obsolescent. In December 1957, Harold Steele, a Quaker backed by the 'Direct Action Committee' (DAC), tried unsuccessfully to disrupt the first British H Bomb test. The DAC established an objective of non-violent civil disobedience, and after successful demonstrations at potential missile bases, their first major project was a march from London to Aldermaston, planned for Easter 1958.

The 1957 Reith Lecture Series titled: 'Russia, the Atom, and the West'<sup>75</sup> was given by George Kennan, ex-US Ambassador to Moscow. It was an examination of contemporary strategic factors, and as with any complex argument, the points Kennan made were deeply nuanced and interrelated. Selective quotation could, and did, support less scrupulous arguments for either side of the disarmament debate. But the public was able to listen to the full series, and make up its own mind; potentially fully informed of the issues.

The government simply did not engage with the CND movement and although set-piece events such as the Aldermaston marches seized the popular imagination at the time, their impact on opinion was not long lived, and nor was there much political momentum generated. The Times, in an unusual editorial, considered that;

'The nation is engaged on a great debate. It is a debate on fundamental issues ... the outcome of which, it can for once be said without extravagance, depends our civilisation. ... Only if there were a sudden wave of hysteria, or a complete national loss of judgement, could any future enemy or present ally fail to see the essential determination of Britain. The temper of the great national debate is, therefore, all important. It is not a debate to be carried on with histrionics or dramatics. And let it be said that Mr MACMILLAN, Mr GAITSKELL, Mr BEVAN and other political leaders have brought to it a seriousness and purpose that has lost nothing by remaining quiet.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> BEVAN, A. 1957. Labour Party Conference Speech Brighton 3 October 1957. The Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches: Penguin.

<sup>74</sup> HARRISON, M. L. 1994. *CND - The challenge of the post cold - war era*. PhD, University of Loughborough.

<sup>75</sup> *Reith Lectures: Russia, the atom and the West*, 1957. Radio. Directed by KENNAN, G. F. London: BBC.

<sup>76</sup> TIMES. Behind the voices. 8 March 1958, p.7.

In March 1958 the Home Secretary, Butler, appeared on BBC's investigative television programme 'Panorama' to discuss Soviet Nuclear testing. As the Times put it; 'He exposed himself to a crossfire of questions from five accomplished controversialists who bitterly oppose the Government's basing of defence policies on the big bombs...'<sup>77</sup> Already, television was portraying this complex issue in a manner designed at least as much to provoke dramatic argument on camera as to elicit public understanding of the issue.

The Executive Committee of what became CND met in Jan 1958. The first meeting was held a month later in Westminster Hall. Although the meeting had been noted in the Times diary page<sup>78</sup> and was very well attended, it was not reported in the Press. After the resounding success of this inaugural meeting, the executive committee revised its initial policy statement and published;

'... We shall seek to persuade the British people that Britain must:

- a) renounce unconditionally the use or production of nuclear weapons and refuse to allow their use by others in her defence;
- b) use her utmost endeavour to bring about negotiations at all levels for agreement to end the armaments race and to lead to a general disarmament convention;
- c) invite the cooperation of other nations, particularly non-nuclear powers, in her renunciation of nuclear weapons.'<sup>79</sup>

From the start of the movement, there was a tension between the executive of the CND which was convinced of the need to influence the political process through the conversion of the Labour Party to a unilateral disarmament position, and many of the 'rank and file' and the DAC who saw the 'movement as essentially extra-parliamentary.'<sup>80</sup> On 4<sup>th</sup> April 1958, 4000 anti-nuclear demonstrators met in Trafalgar Square to march to Aldermaston in a march organised by the DAC and blessed by the CND. The report in The Times the following day was a simple record of fact; there was no hyperbole and it was ostentatiously non-partisan. It concluded; 'The politicians, who have a vested interest in mass movements, have been disturbed lately by the signs of an emotional popular approach to the problems of nuclear weapons ...'<sup>81</sup> The Daily Mirror report was more focused on the walkers, observing that neither Canon Collins, Michael Foot, Ian Mikardo nor Dr Soper (high

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<sup>77</sup> TIMES. Nuclear Tests Challenge. 1 April 1958.

<sup>78</sup> The Times Monday, Feb 17, 1958; pg. 9; col A

<sup>79</sup> TAYLOR, R. & PRITCHARD, C. 1980. *The Protest Makers; The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-1965, Twenty Years On*, Oxford, Pergamon. P6

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.p9 see also HARRISON, M. L. 1994. *CND - The challenge of the post cold - war era*. PhD, University of Loughborough.

<sup>81</sup> The Times 5<sup>th</sup> April 1958 p6 col F

profile CND activists) had actually completed the march but had remained at home and rejoined in Reading.<sup>82</sup>

In 1959, 20,000 met the march from Aldermaston at Trafalgar Square in London but CND was unable to convert this hard core of activists into a coherent political force. The Berlin Crisis of June to November 1961 raised international tension and when both the USA and USSR resumed nuclear testing in the middle of the crisis, they lent the nuclear war issue a real air of urgency. Anti-nuclear demonstrators took full advantage of this and the non-violent direct action (NVDA) of the Committee of 100, a radical group led by philosopher Bertrand Russell, led to 30 of the leadership being imprisoned for a month. In 1962, five of the leaders were imprisoned for 18 months for breaches of the Official Secrets Act.<sup>83</sup>

Arguably, the influence of CND 'peaked' in early 1960. CND's own magazine 'Freedom' called upon activists to 'make this [the 1960 Easter demonstration] the biggest demonstration Britain has ever seen ... In this way we might finally get rid of nuclear weapons.'<sup>84</sup> The Labour Party Conference of 1960 adopted a resolution supporting unilateral nuclear disarmament. CND General Secretary Peggy Duff described the vote as 'one of the highlights of our campaign', whilst John Cox, (later CND Chairman), said that : 'For a while it seemed that CND would soon succeed in changing the country's nuclear policies.'<sup>85</sup> Driven by a few of the largest Trades Unions, against vehement opposition from the leadership and the constituencies, there was a serious division within the Labour Party with Gaitskell and Callaghan advocating the pro-NATO anti-unilateralism line, and Foot, Crossman and Barbara Castle supporting the CND position.

The combined block vote of the TGWU, AEU, USDAW, NUR and ETU defeated two-thirds of the Parliamentary Labour Party and a majority on the National Executive Committee, despite Gaitskell's speech which culminated:

'What sort of people do you think we are? Do you think we can simply accept a decision of this kind? Do you think we can simply become overnight the Pacifists, Unilateralists and fellow-travellers that other people are? ... I ask delegates who are still free to decide how they vote to support what I believe to be a realistic policy on defence, which could yet so easily have united this great Party of

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<sup>82</sup> DAILY MIRROR. Only 11 miles to go now. 7 April 1958, p.8.

<sup>83</sup> TAYLOR, R. & PRITCHARD, C. 1980. *The Protest Makers; The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-1965, Twenty Years On*, Oxford, Pergamon. P12

<sup>84</sup> 'Freedom' 16 Apr 1960 quoted in MERCER, P. 1986. *'Peace' of the Dead*, London, Policy Research Publications. P70

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p70

ours, and to reject what I regard as the suicidal path of unilateral disarmament which will leave our country defenceless and alone.<sup>86</sup>

After concerted effort on the part of the Labour Party National Executive over the next 12 months, the vote was reversed the following year.<sup>87</sup> Although the matter at hand was the vote for unilateral nuclear disarmament, Crossman was convinced that the crux of the issue was more about whether the '...Labour party can be run by personal or collective leadership. That's the real issue - not defence.'<sup>88</sup> and told Gaitskell as much on the night after the vote. Whether Gaitskell took Crossman at his word or not, ironically, the defeat in Scarborough actually strengthened Gaitskell's position as leader of the Labour Party and his overwhelming victory against Wilson in the ensuing leadership contest prevented the more left-wing and pro-disarmament lobby from attaining executive power or fatally dividing the party prior to the 1964 general election.<sup>89</sup> In the event, Gaitskell died aged 56 in January 1963 and was replaced by Wilson.

### **The second generation of the British strategic nuclear deterrent**

Throughout the 1950s, British efforts to establish a national atomic deterrent capability had progressed, despite significant cost constraints. There were significant technical problems with developing weapon delivery systems on both sides of the Atlantic; although the short range British missile 'Blue Steel' missile was successfully deployed, the longer range missile 'Blue Streak' was cancelled in 1960. The British Nuclear Deterrent Study Group (BNDSG) was established in July 1959 to '...consider how the British controlled contribution to the nuclear deterrent can most effectively be maintained in the future, and to make recommendations.'<sup>90</sup> Its activities illustrate inter-Service rivalry and ineptitude that would be comic, were it not serious. At the first meeting, the next step identified was to;

'get an assessment of the technical possibilities for future weapon systems and to consider to what extent their likely operational characteristics meet our requirements. ... (a) missiles launched from land sites; (b) missiles launched from submarines or surface

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<sup>86</sup> WILLIAMS, P. 1979. *Hugh Gaitskell*, London, Jonathan Cape.

<sup>87</sup> MERCER, P. 1986. *'Peace' of the Dead*, London, Policy Research Publications. pp71-73, WILLIAMS, P. 1979. *Hugh Gaitskell*, London, Jonathan Cape. pp 369-379 and; MORGAN, K. 1997. *Callaghan; A Life*, New York, Oxford University Press. pp 162-165

<sup>88</sup> CROSSMAN, R. 1981. *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, London, Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape. P883

<sup>89</sup> Gaitskell's position was reasserted to such an extent that even Wilson's candidacy as a moderate able to bring the party together was derided: 'If the Labour party ends this week facing in two directions, it is certain that the figure of Mr Wilson will be there, at the end of both of them.' (*New Left Review*) Quoted in WILLIAMS, P. 1979. *Hugh Gaitskell*, London, Jonathan Cape. p372

<sup>90</sup> MOD BND(SG)(59)1; British Nuclear Deterrent Study Group - Minutes of a meeting held Monday 16 July 1959. In: MOD (ed.). TNA DEFE 10/665.

craft; and (c) missiles launched from aircraft. Our enquiry will need to cover ballistic and other types of bombardment missiles.<sup>91</sup>

The briefing for Vice Chief of the Air Staff for the October 1959 meeting included an exhaustive critique of the Admiralty classification of targets, level of damage, missiles on station, serviceability, stockpile, strategic warning, number of submarines, costings, communications and navigation, and it concluded 'Our calculations show that up to 14 submarines might be required, not the 9 stated in paragraph 8.'<sup>92</sup> This appears to have been an early shot in an inter-Service competition that would characterise the next 3 years of British nuclear deterrent planning.

The 1959 draft interim report concluded that the programme to replace free-fall bombs (Blue Danube) with the air-delivered short range Blue Steel missile would remain credible only for a short period. It would require replacement with one of a number of future possibilities; Blue Steel mark II, Blue Streak (longer range ground-launched ballistic missile), or Polaris submarine launched ballistic missiles. The criteria for assessment were: Were missiles required due to the vulnerability of manned bombers? Would ballistic missiles continue to be less vulnerable than cruise type missiles? Would the UK geographic position mean missiles needed a mobile platform? What would be the earliest date by which aircraft or submarine systems could be deployed, allowing for assistance from the USA? Was there a gap between this date and the end of service life of the V-bombers, and; if so, were underground missiles the right way to bridge the gap?<sup>93</sup> There was then a series of separate meetings considering the merits of Polaris, Blue Steel and Blue Streak. By April 1960, the group's revised interim report considered that;

'... from the mid-1960s onwards, the only weapons system which would give a reasonable assurance of maintaining a significant deterrent capability in all circumstances would need to consist of ballistic missiles launched from either seaborne or airborne long endurance mobile platforms.'<sup>94</sup>

With the cancellation of the Blue Streak project because of cost and increasingly apparent vulnerability (silo-based weapons in the UK could not be sited far enough apart for survivability against attack without encroaching on built-up areas),<sup>95</sup> and

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> MOD (AIR STAFF) VCAS British Nuclear Study Group Monday (BND(SG)(59)8, 19 Oct 1959 *In*: MOD, A. S. (ed.). TNA AIR 2/13707.

<sup>93</sup> MOD BND(SG)(59)15 British Nuclear Deterrent Study Group - Draft Interim Report 30 Oct 1959. *In*: MOD (ed.). TNA DEFE 10/665.

<sup>94</sup> CABINET OFFICE BND(SG)(60)3 12 April 1960. TNA DEFE 10/665.

<sup>95</sup> To put this into perspective, the Minot Air force base in North Dakota which houses one of the three US ICBM missile wings (each wing operates about 150 individual ICBM silos) covers a territory of

subsequent cancellation of the the US 'Skybolt' programme, which Britain had joined after Blue Streak,<sup>96</sup> British plans for an independent nuclear deterrent appeared to have been left in disarray.

There is a view that this public perception (on both sides of the Atlantic) may have been managed, rather than real.<sup>97</sup> The British government had known since before the original agreement that Skybolt was a risk; at the time of signature, it was a research and development project, and its cancellation was the termination of that project – not an operational US weapon system programme. The BNDSG had been scoping the generic technical requirements for a nuclear deterrent system that would remain in service and credible into the 1970s, and invulnerability to surprise attack was an increasingly significant factor in the conceptual discussions.<sup>98</sup> Since Lord Selkirk (First Lord of the Admiralty) had received a briefing on the Polaris submarine-launched intermediate range ballistic missile system during a visit to the USA in 1958,<sup>99</sup> the Royal Navy had been exploring the potential for a submarine-based deterrent. The Royal Navy continued to analyse Polaris, generating a 1961 report by Flag Officer Submarines which suggested the Royal Navy could purchase and operate submarines armed with Polaris missiles. Although finding little support amongst the Chiefs of Staff at the time, the report was presented to the BNDSG and Defence Ministers.<sup>100</sup>

The US government was seeking an operating base for their own Polaris submarines on the west coast of Scotland, as part of an overall 'deal' for provision of US assistance to the British deterrent modernisation. Macmillan noted that he had met with the Chiefs of Staff in February 1960 where they had suggested abandonment of Blue Streak in favour of an alternative mobile missile system, the most likely option being Polaris. After consideration, the Chiefs of Staff and government decided to continue with air launched systems to exploit the remaining

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more than 8500 square miles – slightly more than the size of Wales. <http://www.minot.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/264267/91st-missile-wing-minot-air-force-base> accessed 29 Nov 16

<sup>96</sup> The Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 6 June 1960, CABINET OFFICE C(60)97 Skybolt - Note by the Minister of Defence 20 Jun 60. TNA CAB 129/101. and the UK was formally notified of cancellation

<sup>97</sup> YOUNG, K. 2004. The Skybolt Crisis of 1962: Muddle or Mischief? *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27, 614-635.

<sup>98</sup> MOD (AIR STAFF) Unreferenced note Sec BNSG to Sir Solly Zuckerman Future Deterrent Policy 26 Sep 1960. In: MOD (AIR STAFF) (ed.). TNA DEFE 19/11.

<sup>99</sup> MOD Unreferenced memorandum Lord Selkirk to Lord Hailsham, 1 Jan 58. TNA/ ADM/ 1/ 27375.

<sup>100</sup> HENNESSY, P. & JINKS, J. 2015. *The Silent Deep: The Royal Navy Submarine Service since 1945*. UK: Penguin Random House. pp202-210



service life of the V-bomber force<sup>101</sup> and this culminated with signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and USA on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1960.

As part of the deal, Cabinet agreed in principle to the provision of the operating and maintenance facilities on the Clyde for US Navy Polaris submarines.<sup>102</sup> Integral to these ongoing negotiations was that: '... [UK] proposed to the United States government that they should offer us a simple option to buy POLARIS submarines if at any time we wished to do so, in return for the facilities we provided in Scotland.'<sup>103</sup>

Contained within this (very high level) contingency planning, was a consideration of the public messaging that would be required if the USN were to station Polaris submarines on the Clyde; the main points of concern were the level of control of Polaris missile launch that the British government could exert, and a comparison of the vicinity of US population centres with nuclear operating and storage facilities. In the event, the US was unwilling to compromise on the control of launch at sea, and the Cabinet agreed; '...it would be preferable that the proposed public statement should not indicate that there could be no certainty of consultation in an emergency.'<sup>104</sup>

Young considers two explanations for the apparent ineptitude of the British handling of the indications of the impending cancellation of Skybolt in 1962, suggesting that the UK was either muddled or mischievous; 'There is clear evidence that London was regularly and fully informed about Skybolt's progress, and had no shortage of alternatives, one of which was greatly preferred...'<sup>105</sup> The 'mischief' thesis is that the enthusiasm for Skybolt was simulated in order to bring about the eventual supply, under conditions of reluctantly- recognised obligation, of Polaris. This would be a very sceptical interpretation of the events of late 1962, which led to the agreement in Nassau for the UK to purchase Polaris. A third alternative would be straightforward internecine inter-Service competition in a virtual re-run of the debates of the 1930s; with the Royal Air Force holding out for the air-launched

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<sup>101</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2011. *The Macmillan Diaries Vol II*, London, Pan Macmillan. P272

<sup>102</sup> CABINET OFFICE CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet Thursday, 28th July, 1960,. TNA CAB/128/34.

<sup>103</sup> CABINET OFFICE Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House on Thursday 15 Sept 1960. TNA CAB/128/34.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> YOUNG, K. 2004. The Skybolt Crisis of 1962: Muddle or Mischief? *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27, 614-635. pp628-629

Skybolt which would perpetuate the independent striking force nature of the Service.

Certainly, Macmillan gives no hint of a developing crisis in his diaries prior to his departure for Nassau, and after the UK/US talks on the subject in March 1960 he seems to have regarded Skybolt and Polaris both as viable options;

‘We have also got out of the Americans a very useful exchange of notes about SKYBOLT and POLARIS. They undertake to let us have the vehicles (by sale or gift), we making our own nuclear heads. This allows us to abandon Blue Streak (rocket) without damage to our prospects of maintaining - in the late 1960s and early 1970s - our independent nuclear deterrent.’<sup>106</sup>

This rivalry was portrayed in the press in early October; ‘The triform structure of Britain's armed forces is being seriously challenged for the first time since a separate strategic air arm came into being 45 years ago, and the infighting shows signs of becoming savage.’<sup>107</sup> The article acknowledged the inevitability of obsolescence of an air-launched strategic nuclear deterrent;

‘The proponents of land-based air power are canvassing the ingenious concept of ‘patrol aircraft’ ... Naval strategists reply that this is simply a device to prolong the Air Force monopoly of the deterrent, and that the patrol aircraft would be hopelessly vulnerable ...’<sup>108</sup>

This suggests that the Services had resorted to seeking to use public opinion to influence this dispute and, ironically, appears to be the only public engagement by any official body.

Confusion and speculation about the fate of Skybolt increased through the autumn of 1962: The Defence Correspondent of the Times wrote;

‘It appears that the Defence Department has decided that Skybolt is not strategically worth its probable cost but whether this view is to be over-ruled on political or strategic grounds by the White House or State Department remains to be seen. What is certain is that a decision of some sort will have to be made soon.’<sup>109</sup>

3 days later, on 11<sup>th</sup> December the Diplomatic correspondent wrote;

‘These Anglo-American talks in London, it is emphasized, are a normal prelude to the NATO meeting this week in Paris, but the

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<sup>106</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2011. *The Macmillan Diaries Vol II*, London, Pan Macmillan. P285

<sup>107</sup> TIMES. Behind the Scenes Service Struggle. 4 October 1962, p.9.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> TIMES. Skybolt Missile's Future In Doubt., 8 December 1962, p.8.

discussions between the two Ministers on the future of Skybolt, which is now due to pass from the development to the production stage, have already stolen all the limelight, even if they do not take up all the time at all the talks.'<sup>110</sup>

And on 13<sup>th</sup> December, the Defence Correspondent wrote;

'Declarations attributed to the Ministry of Defence that the cancellation of the Skybolt programme might mean a radical reappraisal of British defence policy have caused no dismay amongst Americans here.'<sup>111</sup>

Macmillan noted on 16<sup>th</sup> December, on the eve of his trip to Nassau, that '... I got back to a meeting on Skybolt and Polaris which lasted till late in the evening. We shall have a difficult time with the Americans in Nassau.'<sup>112</sup> Clearly he was expecting to negotiate hard, but the tenor of his thoughts on Nassau suggest that rather than the public debate about purchase of American air-launched or submarine launched systems, the real debate was about command and control of those nuclear forces:

'Broadly, I have agreed to make our present bomber force (or part of it) and our Polaris force (when it comes) a NATO force for general purposes. But I have reserved absolutely the right of HMG to use it indefinitely 'for supreme national interest'. These phrases will be argued and counter-argued. But they represent a genuine attempt (wh Americans eventually accepted) to make a proper contribution to interdependent defence, while retaining the ultimate rights of a sovereign state. This accepts the facts of life as they are. But I do not conceal from myself that the whole concept will be much knocked about by controversy at home. The Cabinet (wh [sic] met on the Friday morning and was kept fully informed throughout) did not much like it, altho' [sic] they backed us up loyally...'<sup>113</sup>

The arrangements made by Macmillan and Kennedy at Nassau to enable the British purchase of the US submarine launched ballistic missile Polaris were agreed by Cabinet on 3 Jan 1963 and the Polaris Sales Agreement was signed in April 1963. Macmillan was unsure of the reception his 'deal' would receive;

'Whether Parliament and the country will think we have well or badly I cannot tell yet. Yesterday's press was quite good (except of course Lord Beaverbrook's) Today's (Sunday's) is very bad. The Opposition will attack our whole record on defence ... The 'Patriots' (led by Lord Beaverbrook and the isolationists) will accuse us of

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<sup>110</sup> TIMES. No Decision Until Bahamas Meeting. 11 Dec 1962, p.10.

<sup>111</sup> TIMES. Skybolt Excluded from US Strategic Plan: British Defence Policy thrown into the Melting Pot., 13 December 1962, p.8, *ibid*.

<sup>112</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2011. *The Macmillan Diaries Vol II*, London, Pan Macmillan. P526

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*. P528

'selling out Britain'. No one will find it profitable to take a fair and balanced view.'<sup>114</sup>

In the ensuing debate, he was to be proved generally right. In the meantime, the World moved on. Far from highlighting the dangers of nuclear weapons, the Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis seemed to suggest that deterrence worked since the superpowers were seen to back away from the 'brink' and the compelling urgency that had given such an edge to the CND campaign seemed to ebb.

### **Cuban Missile Crisis**

One area where prominent political leadership and careful government public presentation of British nuclear deterrence policy and strategy might be expected to be uniquely salient would be in the midst of an international crisis with a nuclear dimension. To date, fortunately, there has been only one, and political leadership and careful government presentation in the UK were conspicuously lacking.

The first Macmillan knew of the Cuban Missile crisis was in the evening of Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October, when he received from President Kennedy a short account of the serious situation which was developing over Cuba. This was followed by a visit from the United States Ambassador, David Bruce who provided by hand a 'long letter from President Kennedy, as well as a great dossier to prove that ... there had now been secretly deployed in Cuba a formidable armoury of MRBMs and IRBMs which were a pistol pointed at America ... and which could not be tolerated.'<sup>115</sup>

Having spoken with Home (Foreign Secretary) and Maudling (Chancellor) Macmillan spoke with President Kennedy by telephone after his televised presidential address to the nation on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> October. The full text of the address was published on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> in most of the British press, with no apparent context or input from the British government.

The Times simply reported the full text of the address, the Daily Express reported the speech but also ran front page coverage of the deployment of US forces into the Caribbean, the evacuation of families from the US base at Guantanamo Bay, and the surprise apparently expressed by members of the Cabinet at the lack of notice given to the UK.<sup>116</sup> The Guardian also reported the full text under the headline 'Soviet Deception on Cuba' but also ran a front page story; 'Missile Bases Built up – 1500 mile range claimed' and an editorial comment; 'Caribbean Storm Warning.'<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p527

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. P508

<sup>116</sup> DAILY EXPRESS. 1am: BLOCKADE ON. 23 October 1962, p.1.

<sup>117</sup> GUARDIAN. Soviet Deception on Cuba. 23 October 1962, p.15., p1 and p8

The Guardian editorial wondered why the USSR had built missile bases on Cuba and speculated that they may have done so '...primarily to demonstrate to the US and to the world the meaning of American bases close to Soviet territory.'

Cabinet met on the morning of 23rd and considered that the;

'...country would expect to be informed at once of the government's reaction to President Kennedy's speech. It was agreed that in any immediate comment on the situation Ministers should take the line that the government were deeply concerned at the provocation presented by Soviet action in Cuba, that they had been kept fully informed by the United States authorities, that they would give full support to the United States in the forthcoming debate in the Security Council and that the United Kingdom representative was being instructed accordingly; and that they had no objection to the imposition of the blockade since British ships had already been instructed not to carry arms to Cuba. ... There would be serious repercussions in Parliament. The Leader of the Opposition, who had been informed of the situation on 21st October, had given no undertaking to refrain from condemning the United States action and some of his supporters would almost inevitably do so.'<sup>118</sup>

Parliament was in recess until 25<sup>th</sup> October when the Queen's Speech would open the next session. There was no discussion of a proactive public statement. This may be due to a fundamental assumption that informing the country of the government's reaction to Kennedy's speech was synonymous with informing Parliament, and in any case, the government had nothing to say; 'Summing up the Prime Minister said that it was clear that no decision on policy could be taken until some firmer indication had been obtained of the probable nature of Mr. Khrushchev's reaction to the United States blockade of Cuba.'<sup>119</sup> The Foreign Office did issue a short statement;

'Her Majesty's government feel deep concern at the provocative action of the Soviet Union in placing offensive nuclear weapons in Cuba. Mr Gromyko lately gave the most positive assurance that the weapons which the Soviet Union was supplying to Cuba were purely defensive. The Soviet Union has been guilty of deception as well as guilty of deliberately opening up a new area of instability. Instructions have been sent to Sir Patrick Dean (permanent British Representative to the United Nations) to support the American request to the security Council that they should make recommendations to end this danger.'<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> CABINET OFFICE CC(62) 61st Conclusions Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet 23 October 1962. TNA CAB/128/36.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted verbatim in GUARDIAN. Britain Behind Kennedy: "Soviet Guilt". 24 October 1962, p.1.

As a statement of fact, the Foreign Office statement lacks little, but it leaves the way ahead to the imagination of the reader, or the editor.

In contrast to the restrained and very factual reports of Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October, Wednesday's Daily Mirror reported under the headline; 'US Hunts Target No1 – The Red Rocket Runner';

'American warships ... are lying in wait for the Soviet rocket carrying freighter Polotavia'. Also on the front page, it reported that leave had been stopped for all Soviet armed forces personnel, and on the back page reported 'a massive strike force of American jet fighters is being assembled here for patrol missions over Cuban waters.'<sup>121</sup>

The editorial comment 'Courage, but is it wise?' considers that Kennedy has acted with great courage over Cuba but then concludes;

'What Kennedy has done is to bring the cold war to a head. Now it is Mr Krushchev's turn to try to frighten us. He has begun by alerting the Red Army. We shall hear warlike words. He may take action in Berlin. ... for although Mr Kennedy had every right to declare a blockade, ... the repercussions may be world-wide. If they are, they cannot fail to affect us.'<sup>122</sup>

On 25<sup>th</sup> October, Cabinet met once more and decided; '...it did not seem that there was any action that the Prime Minister could usefully take at the present juncture; an early visit to Washington, for example, could easily be misinterpreted as a mission of appeasement.'<sup>123</sup> There was no discussion on public messaging. That afternoon, Parliament met and Macmillan made a statement to the House simply outlining the facts and presenting an oddly ambivalent position of tacit, but not explicit, support to the American position. He advocated support to the UN efforts to resolve the situation, but when challenged by Gaitskell, refused to be drawn to overt support for the US actions:

'In the Security Council, the United States representative has made a strong appeal for a resolution which calls for the dismantling and withdrawal from Cuba of all nuclear missiles and offensive weapons and for international supervision of this process by a United Nations Observer Corps. The resolution also urgently recommends that the United States and the Soviet Union should confer promptly on measures to remove the existing threat to the security of the western hemisphere and the peace of the world, and to report thereon to the Security Council. ... As the House knows, Sir Patrick

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<sup>121</sup> DAILY MIRROR. US Hunts Target No1- the Red Rocket Runner. 24 October 1962, p.1. and p32

<sup>122</sup> DAILY MIRROR. Courage - but is it wise? , 24 October 1962, p.2.

<sup>123</sup> CABINET OFFICE CC(62) 62nd Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet 25 October 1962. TNA CAB/128/36.

Dean, speaking on behalf of Her Majesty's government, gave his support to this resolution.... The British government are, of course, concerned that this new threat to security should be dealt with as rapidly as possible and will add their support to any measures which genuinely lead to that end. They trust also that, based upon some alleviation of the present state of tension, it might be possible to move into a wider field of negotiation.<sup>124</sup>

The Cabinet next met on 29<sup>th</sup>, after the Crisis had been substantially defused by Krushchev's agreement to withdraw the missiles. The Chiefs of Staff did not record discussions of the implications of the crisis during October 1962 and the only Cabinet meetings were as described above. The Parliamentary discussion on Macmillan's statement was curtailed by the demand by Black Rod to attend the Queen's Speech; drawing a ribald; 'To hell with the Lords' from Jon Rankin (Labour MP for Glasgow Govan). After the prorogation, the debate was not resumed. There is a perception in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that this was a week of near panic in the UK with government and public assuming a nuclear war was imminent and preparing accordingly. In the USA; 'There was some panic. People ran to grocery stores and took the bread and the milk and, you know, once the speech was given, we all said, 'Oh, my God.' And it was the scariest week of our lives.'<sup>125</sup> This is not reflected in the contemporary British press; the Daily Mirror reported on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October that sixth-formers at Midhurst Grammar School held a two-day strike, including a ten-minute vigil at the local war memorial. Other public reactions listed included a 600-strong CND demonstration outside the American Embassy, student protests at Manchester, Hull, Leicester, Birmingham and Swansea, and a Company Director who was keeping his children home from school.<sup>126</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, after reporting the exchanges in the Commons, the Daily Mirror commented that; 'The Cuban crisis has brought the world to the brink of war. Yet there is hope that the shock will inspire Kennedy and Krushchev to negotiate more realistically than they have done in the past.'<sup>127</sup> The Cuban missile crisis was less than two years after the 1960 CND Aldermaston March and the associated mass demonstrations, but does not appear to have seized the public imagination, except perhaps in retrospect. In this sense, the lack of government intervention was

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<sup>124</sup> HC Debate 25 October 1962. HANSARD vol 664 cc1053-64. Col 1054

<sup>125</sup> NEWS, C. 2012. *Remembering Cuban Missile crisis, 50 years later* [Online]. Washington DC: CBS. Available: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/remembering-cuban-missile-crisis-50-years-later/> [Accessed 17 December 2012].

<sup>126</sup> DAILY MIRROR. No-War Strike in the Sixth Form. p.32.

<sup>127</sup> DAILY MIRROR. Helpful Crisis? , 26 October 1962, p.2.

successful in minimising the domestic impact of the Crisis, but there is no hint in the record that this was a deliberate objective.

### **Labour Party in government**

By the time of the General Election in 1964, CND was virtually a spent force and unilateral disarmament was never really a significant election issue. The 1961 Labour Party conference had rejected unilateral disarmament, although it had supported '...an end to British nuclear testing, as well as no first use of nuclear weapons, and abandonment of the British deterrent.'<sup>128</sup> Despite a corresponding election manifesto commitment, Wilson's Labour government did not renegotiate the Polaris Sales Agreement, although under the Labour government, Britain built and deployed only four of the planned five Polaris submarines.

The 1964 Labour manifesto had stated that; '[Polaris] will not be independent and it will not be British and it will not deter ... We shall propose the renegotiation of the Nassau agreement.'<sup>129</sup> Wilson instigated a Cabinet Committee to consider Defence Policy (MISC 17) which met at Chequers in November in order to consider defence policy, which performance needs must establish the position on the nuclear deterrent. This discussion started; 'Having decided in principle to continue the Polaris programme, the major question which faced us ... was how to get rid of Macmillan's commitment to put the submarines into the [NATO Multi-Lateral Force] MLF,<sup>130</sup> since we were to meet President Johnson in Washington a fortnight later.'<sup>131</sup> The MISC 17 meeting<sup>132</sup> comprised discussion of numbers of Polaris submarines already under construction and developed into a consideration of different mechanisms of command and control for this force under NATO and national arrangements; 'Instead we would propose the establishment of an Atlantic Nuclear Force<sup>133</sup> to which we would commit all our nuclear weapons ... Johnson agreed to

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<sup>128</sup> SCOTT, L. 2006. Labour and the bomb: the first 80 years. *International Affairs*, 82, 685-700. P689

<sup>129</sup> LABOUR PARTY. 1964. *The New Britain* [Online]. Available: <http://labourmanifesto.com/1964/1964-labour-manifesto.shtml> [Accessed 23 Sept 2015].

<sup>130</sup> The Multi Lateral Force – was an American concept for a force of nuclear armed ships and submarines to be manned by mixed NATO crews under American command and control. The initial manning trial on board USS Claude D Ricketts was a success but the project was shelved because it was not politically tenable for the NATO allies. BOUWMAN, B. 2013. Present at the Undoing: The Netherlands and the Multilateral Force. *Nuclear Proliferation International History Project* [Online]. Available: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/present-the-undoing-the-netherlands-and-the-multilateral-force> [Accessed 27 Jul 2017].

<sup>131</sup> HEALEY, D. 1989. *The Time of My Life*, London, Michael Joseph. P304

<sup>132</sup> CABINET OFFICE MISC 17/4 Cabinet Defence Policy Minutes of a Meeting at Chequers 22 November 1964. TNA CAB 130/213.

<sup>133</sup> The ANF was a British proposal to commit all of the UK Polaris weapons to NATO, but retaining an element of UK discretion in their command and release authority. This language was the forerunner to the current formulation 'committed to the defence of NATO' which has no formal standing in NATO command relationships.



drop the MLF in favour of the ANF. Within a year the ANF had also sunk without trace, because nobody wanted it.<sup>134</sup> Healey seems to have been surprised that;

‘...our decision to keep a British nuclear deterrent was never contested; opposition focused on our agreement to host the American Polaris submarines at Holy Loch. I had never hesitated to justify our policy on nuclear weapons, and had explained NATO's nuclear strategy in detail in the House of Commons.’<sup>135</sup>

The *volte-face* on the manifesto commitment on Polaris was carefully wrapped into detailed discussion of the Atlantic Nuclear Force at every opportunity. As Healey observed, Wilson was treated surprisingly gently by the Press, even by the standards of the time: the Observer considered that;

‘By committing himself to the principle of an Atlantic Nuclear Force, Mr Wilson may have got rid of the albatross of the independent deterrent. But by trying to avoid the unpopularity involved in scrapping the Polaris submarine programme, he has denied himself the opportunity of also urging the case for accepting America's nuclear strength as sufficient protection for Europe...’<sup>136</sup>

In the run-up to the 1965 Defence White paper, the Guardian considered;

‘Are Labour's first measures - completion of four Polaris submarines, the ANF, and the Asian nuclear umbrella - consistent with its election pledges? Some critics have taken them as going in the opposite direction. Why build any Polaris submarines? The answer is that these four must be paid for anyway and that they can help to prepare for nuclear interdependence. ... Mr Wilson said that Labour would complete any submarines that had gone beyond the point of no return - the point that is, at which to cancel or convert them would cost about as much as completing them. Since then the proposal for an Atlantic Nuclear Force has been evolved. ... But does not the ANF in turn create extra nuclear weapons? Is it not a reversal of Labour's pledge? No: it is a step towards the right objectives.’<sup>137</sup>

This ‘point of no return’ argument was not in fact true; Healey had been briefed on his arrival at the MOD that only two SSBNs were under construction and that all of them could be converted to the hunter-killer role at no significant cost. At Wilson's

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<sup>134</sup> HEALEY, D. 1989. *The Time of My Life*, London, Michael Joseph. P305 To general agreement at a workshop of senior participants in British nuclear policy and historians chaired by Peter Hennessy in 2007, Michael Quinlan observed that; ‘The ANF seemed to me to have a dual purpose. One was to fudge the Labour Party problem, and the other was to kill the NATO Multi-Lateral Force.’

HENNESSY, P. 2007. *Cabinets and the Bomb workshop* [Online]. London: British Academy.

Available: <https://www.britac.ac.uk/node/4986/> [Accessed 27 July 2017].

<sup>135</sup> HEALEY, D. 1989. *The Time of My Life*, London, Michael Joseph. p351

<sup>136</sup> OBSERVER. Comments: The Deterrent. 20 December 1964, p.7.

<sup>137</sup> GUARDIAN. Towards a Fresh Defence Policy. 22 February 1965, p.10.

request, Wilson, Healey and Walker had kept this from MISC 17. Healey subsequently explained that;

'[Healey] thought that in this uncertain world into which we were moving, a few Polaris submarines would be worth more than the same number of hunter-killers, both because they would give Britain more influence, particularly in Washington ... Moreover their running costs would be only £4million a year - about two percent of the defence budget.'<sup>138</sup>

He had made this argument to the Commons in Opposition in March 1963, before publication of the Manifesto and, obviously prior to but not at the MISC 17 meeting in November 1964.

### **Defence Policy and the withdrawal from East of Suez**

The issue of maintenance of the British position as a world power dominated the foreign and defence policy of both Macmillan's and Wilson's governments, even as they oversaw the retreat from East of Suez.<sup>139</sup> Darwin describes this as: '... an attempt, inevitably muddled and incoherent, to come to terms with a further contraction of British world power, an attempt however to stabilise Britain's world position to retain its basic elements, not to abandon it altogether.'<sup>140</sup> In this, possession of nuclear weapons was perceived as a potential surrogate for empire; nuclear ownership was regarded by successive governments as a pre-requisite for remaining in the front rank of world powers: 'The issue is not Europe v East of Suez, the problem is whether we are an island off the north-west coast of Europe or a world power...'<sup>141</sup>

British military commitments in the Middle and Far East were almost continuously reviewed during the financially straitened 1960s, and nuclear capabilities were not considered as distinct or significant factors. They were simply aspects of existing commitments to be assessed alongside other political and strategic issues:

'The Akrotiri base [Cyprus] is used for the four Canberra strike squadrons which we have declared to CENTO [The Central Treaty

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<sup>138</sup> HEALEY, D. 1989. *The Time of My Life*, London, Michael Joseph. P302

<sup>139</sup> The protracted withdrawal from colonial commitments between 1945 and 1970 is a complex area of British strategic history and only of peripheral relevance to this analysis. See DARWIN, J. 1991. *The End of the British Empire*, Oxford, Blackwell. and BARNETT, C. 1972. *The Collapse of British Power*.

<sup>140</sup> DARWIN, J. 1988. *Britain and Decolonisation; the Retreat from Empire in the Post War World*, London, Macmillan. P288 See also BARTLETT, C. 1972. *The Long Retreat: A Short History of British Defence Policy 1945-1970*, London, Macmillan. p97: 'A strategic nuclear bomber force was also needed to preserve Britain's position as a world power.'

<sup>141</sup> CABINET OFFICE Defence Review: Minute by Mr Walker to Prime Minister on the issue of 'whether we are an island off the north west corner of Europe, or a World Power' dated 23 Nov 1965. TNA PREM 13/216 ff6-9. Paragraph 2

Organisation]:<sup>142</sup> they are the only CENTO forces with nuclear capability and virtually the only forces declared to CENTO other than those of its regional members ...<sup>143</sup>

There was no strategic imperative for nuclear weapons specifically in order to defend British interests East of Suez, although there had been a discussion in 1965 in Wilson's MISC 17 which considered the need to provide nuclear weapons for British forces potentially facing a nuclear armed enemy in the Far East (China). This concept was dismissed in the feasibility stage when it became obvious that it would involve '...the whole of our future nuclear policy and [require] further study as regards both feasibility and cost in relation to the total defence budget.'<sup>144</sup> and 'to suggest any change in our plans now might hamper the development of proposals for the control of nuclear forces in Europe.'<sup>145</sup> By 1968, having told President Johnson 'At the root of this is a still rather confused groping for the real role that Britain ought to be playing in the world,'<sup>146</sup> Wilson's government came down firmly on the assumption that; 'Our standing in the world depended on the soundness of our economy, and not on a world-wide military presence.'<sup>147</sup> This clearly did not allude to the retention of nuclear weapons as status symbols. It did, however, set the tenor of subsequent public strategic discourse, looking towards NATO and the defence of Europe as the key defence role, and to 'soft power' for Britain's world role.

### **The 1970s – Continuous At-Sea Deterrence**

Much of the protest effort and public defence discussion during the late 60s and early 70s was focused on the war in Vietnam, with CND developing and using many of the tactics of civil disobedience and non-violent direct action that had been evolved through the anti-nuclear demonstrations of the 1958-63 period. The Polaris submarines were duly constructed and deployed, with Continuous at Sea Deterrence being established at noon on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1969 when HMS Resolution

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<sup>142</sup> CENTO was a treaty signed in 1955 by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the UK, designed to minimise Soviet influence in the Middle East.

<sup>143</sup> CABINET OFFICE MISC 17/4 Defence Review: report to ministers by an Official Committee (Chairman Sir B Trend) of the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee 8 Nov 1965. TNA CAB 130/213. Paragraph 37

<sup>144</sup> CABINET OFFICE MISC 17/8 Defence policy; Record of a meeting at 10 Downing Street of ministers, service chiefs and senior officials 13 Nov 1965. TNA CAB 130/213. Paragraph i

<sup>145</sup> MINISTRY OF DEFENCE The United Kingdom Defence review; draft aide memoire by HMG for discussion in Washington and Canberra, dated Jan 1966. TNA DEFE 13/477. Paragraph 6

<sup>146</sup> CABINET OFFICE Foreign Office Telegram No 554: Text of Mr Wilson's reply to President Johnson's letter of 11 Jan 68. 15 Jan 68. TNA PREM 13/1999.

<sup>147</sup> CABINET OFFICE CC(68)3 Public Expenditure: post devaluation measures: Cabinet conclusions on withdrawal from East of Suez. 4 Jan 1968. TNA CAB 128/43. P6

relinquished 'Ready' status to HMS Renown.<sup>148</sup> Since then, at least one SSBN has been perpetually 'Ready'.

In terms of public nuclear policy engagement, the 1970s were a quiet decade, until the Soviet deployment of SS20 in 1979, but the evolution of nuclear deterrence policy and strategy during that time had been rapid and considerable, and secret developments would have significant repercussions for public policy. As predicted, missile technology had rendered a purely air-delivered deterrent critically vulnerable to pre-emptive strike (attack on the ground), and the emergence of Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) defences had threatened to render the British Polaris system incapable of guaranteeing to destroy Moscow's leadership centres in a unilateral strike. In extreme secrecy, successive governments since Wilson's had maintained Project Super Antelope (later Chevaline) which was designed to enhance the payload delivered by British Polaris missiles in order to overcome this shortcoming. Such discussions had to remain out of the public eye (indeed, they were kept to the very smallest circles even within the Cabinet) because to admit that such a development was necessary would call into question the credibility of the deterrent.<sup>149</sup>

The 1979 Labour Party General Election Manifesto stated;

'In 1974, we renounced any intention of moving towards the production of a new generation of nuclear weapons or a successor to the Polaris nuclear force; we reiterate our belief that this is the best course for Britain. But many great issues affecting our allies and the world are involved, and a new round of strategic arms limitation negotiations will soon begin. We think it is essential that there must be a full and informed debate about these issues in the country before the necessary decision is taken.'<sup>150</sup>

There was an element of sophistry about the government position during this time. In particular, as Lord Owen argues, 'Callaghan wanted to be more open about issues, in '78 I think, and the Cabinet Secretary argued him out of that position.'<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> During the Cold War, Ready Status meant the SSBN was at a few minutes notice to fire (Quick reaction Alert (Nuclear)). This profile was amended by successive defence reviews after the end of the Cold War and the notice to fire is now measured in days, but the Ready SSBN remains in all respects prepared to launch within the notice deemed appropriate by the government.

<sup>149</sup> This is a fascinating discussion, based on the premise that in order to deter the USSR, the UK had to be able to threaten to destroy Moscow with a unilateral strike. This 'Moscow Criterion' had been the benchmark for the credibility of the deterrent throughout the life of the Polaris system, and argument about its continued relevance coloured both Chevaline development and discussion about the Polaris replacement. See: STODDART, K. 2008. Maintaining the 'Moscow Criterion': British Strategic Nuclear Targeting 1974–1979. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31, 897–924.

<sup>150</sup> LABOUR PARTY. 1979. *The Labour Way is the Better Way* [Online]. London: Labour Party. Available: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab79.htm> [Accessed 23 Sept 2015].

<sup>151</sup> LORD OWEN Interview with A Corbett 16 Apr 2015.

Discussion within the Cabinet was being pushed by the need to make a decision on a replacement for Polaris.

In 1977, Callaghan had established a ministerial Nuclear Policy Group comprising the Foreign Secretary (David Owen), the Defence Secretary (Fred Mulley) and the Chancellor (Dennis Healey) to consider the options for replacement of Polaris. In October, that group reached '... general agreement on the desirability of maintaining an independent UK nuclear deterrent but the view was strongly expressed that the criterion on which the effectiveness of our existing deterrent was judged - namely its capacity to penetrate the ABM defences around Moscow and destroy 40% of the Moscow region - should be re-examined.'<sup>152</sup> In a prescient move, they also agreed that;

'We shall need to take decisions on the renewal or replacement of the British [Tactical Nuclear Forces] weapons in the next year or two since their present life is limited to the early 1980s. These decisions will be influenced not only by the Alliance's study on the modernisation of TNF but will also take account of national factors such as the political implications of embarking on a replacement programme, costs and availability of scientific resources. ... Ministers will not need to take decisions for another year or two.'<sup>153</sup>

Faced with the latter recommendation, Ministers decided not to take decisions for another year or two.

In November 1977, the Cabinet Secretary advised Callaghan that it would be necessary to consider the following for a replacement for Polaris;

- '(a) The politico-military requirement (for what purposes would we want to have the system?)
- (b) The main criteria (given the purposes, what must the system be able to do?) (The criteria for deterrence are already being studied by a group set up, in accordance with Ministers' instructions, to examine the continuing validity of the Moscow criterion for the effectiveness of the British deterrent.)
- (c) The main characteristics (how best to do the task, taking account eg; of technical and resource factors.)

Experience suggests that studies and decisions on these basic issues could take one or two years.'<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> CABINET OFFICE Conclusions of a Ministerial Meeting held at No 10 Downing Street on Friday 28 October 1977 at 0945 TNA PREM16/1564.

<sup>153</sup> CABINET OFFICE A05828 Military Nuclear Issues 25 Oct 77. TNA PREM 16/1564.

<sup>154</sup> CABINET OFFICE A06085 Nuclear Matters 28 Nov 77 Loose Minute from Cabinet Secretary to PM TNA PREM16/1564.

Two groups had been set up by the Ministerial group, one looking at the Moscow Criterion, headed by the Chief Scientific Adviser to the MOD, Ronald Mason, and one looking at technical and system options, headed by Anthony Duff.

The Foreign Secretary, Owen, felt strongly that a like-for-like replacement was not necessary and, with the help of a small think-tank within his Private Office he produced an extensive (classified) document for Callaghan's Nuclear Policy Group arguing for a different strategic nuclear deterrent – one based on submarine-launched cruise missiles. This challenged the assumptions and recommendations of the Cabinet Office studies and Owen felt that he could not have such a document produced within by FCO because '... they didn't agree with me and anyhow they were all hung up on all that sorts of thing. I said to him [Callaghan] that I had largely put up this in order to have a proper debate. He was very encouraging.'<sup>155</sup>

There was an element of very careful management about the government position during this time; the Terms of Reference for the study groups stated;

'No decision on the future of the deterrent is needed during the lifetime of the present Parliament. The purpose of this study is to examine and report on all the factors which the next Government, of whichever political Party, will need to take into account when reaching that decision. Its purpose is solely to provide the basis on which a fully informed decision can be taken by the next Government.'<sup>156</sup>

Two months later, the Defence Secretary, Mulley (one of three Ministers who knew of the Duff and Mason studies), answered Parliamentary Questions on studies into missile systems; 'We have no plans to develop a cruise missile or a successor to Polaris. ... I have made it clear many times that we stand by the commitment in our election manifesto not to proceed with a new generation of nuclear strategic missiles.'<sup>157</sup> Mulley's language was very carefully negotiated<sup>158</sup> in order to answer the questions without appearing to admit to a contravention of the manifesto commitment. In April 1979 Hennessy reported in *The Times* a;

'...private but outspoken dispute with an all-party select committee of the Commons by his refusal to permit serving officers, civil servants and government scientists to give evidence about the options for a third generation British nuclear deterrent to replace the Royal Navy's Polaris submarine squadron.'<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> LORD OWEN Interview with A Corbett 16 Apr 2015.

<sup>156</sup> MOD Memorandum from PPS to Prime Minister to Cabinet Secretary UK Nuclear Deterrent dated 30 Jan 78. TNA PREM 16/1654.

<sup>157</sup> HC Debate 21 March 1978. HANSARD vol 946 cc1313-1315.

<sup>158</sup> MOD PQ Handling Brief dated 21 Mar 78. TNA PREM 16/1564.

<sup>159</sup> TIMES. Mr Mulley angers specialists over successor to Polaris. 30 Apr 1979, p.1.

This tight control of the knowledge of the existence of the Duff and Mason studies had no basis in security, merely in the presentational difficulties these studies would have caused for the Labour government.

Callaghan's government laid competent groundwork for the continuation of the British strategic nuclear deterrent. This was completed, in violation of the spirit, if not the letter of the manifesto commitments on which it had been elected. In particular, the commissioning of the Duff and Mason Studies was a significant move 'towards the production of a new generation of nuclear weapons or a successor to the Polaris nuclear force' and the debates engendered by Owen's Cruise Missile papers tested many of the assumptions that informed the case for Trident; but the wider Cabinet, and the public, was perforce ignorant of these developments. Similarly, in what could have been presented as a coup for British defence on a par with Macmillan's Polaris negotiations, Callaghan had agreed in principle to the sale of the US Trident C4 system on similar terms with President Carter during their meeting in Guadeloupe in January 1979, but was unable to announce this during that Parliament. Owen was certain that had Labour won the 1979 election, Callaghan would have moved to replace Polaris with Trident: '...he definitely wanted to keep the nuclear deterrent and he would have argued, as Prime Minister that we should do Trident and he told me really that he felt that the weakness in my case was that ... we couldn't have a deterrent that was based on unproven technology.'<sup>160</sup>

Much like Wilson's government 15 years earlier, Callaghan's government had been elected on a mandate not to evolve the next generation of the British strategic nuclear deterrent, yet once in office both had identified pressing imperatives that required the reversal of this position. Wilson appeared able to do so relatively openly, although it required some terminological inexactitude on the status of the Polaris submarines to do so. Callaghan's government maintained the strictest secrecy over the Duff and Mason Studies, and exploited very carefully worded statements in public and Parliament in order to sustain the fig leaf of the 1974 manifesto commitment. The 1979 Labour Manifesto opened the way for a successful Labour government to exploit the activities of Callaghan's cabinet committees; 'We think it is essential that there must be a full and informed debate about these issues in the country before the necessary decision is taken.'<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> LORD OWEN Interview with A Corbett 16 Apr 2015.

<sup>161</sup> LABOUR PARTY. 1979. *The Labour Way is the Better Way* [Online]. London: Labour Party. Available: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab79.htm> [Accessed 23 Sept 2015].

## Chapter Six: The Decision to replace Polaris

### Initial discussions on Trident

Mrs Thatcher's government was elected in May 1979 with a manifesto pledge to make significant increases in the level of defence spending:

'During the past five years the military threat to the West has grown steadily as the Communist bloc has established virtual parity in strategic nuclear weapons and a substantial superiority in conventional weapons. Yet Labour have cut down our forces, weakened our defences and reduced our contribution to NATO. And the Left are pressing for still more reductions. ... The SALT discussions increase the importance of ensuring the continuing effectiveness of Britain's nuclear deterrent.'<sup>1</sup>

The Conservative government decision on 'ensuring the continuing effectiveness' of Britain's nuclear deterrent was substantially informed by the Duff-Mason report which, exceptionally, Callaghan had instructed to be handed over to the incoming Prime Minister. Mrs Thatcher also received private assurances from President Carter that he would honour the arrangement he had come to with Callaghan in which the USA would be prepared to negotiate the sale of Trident C4 with MIRV technology, but Carter wished this kept private until SALT II was ratified. The decision for the replacement of Polaris was managed by yet another small group of Ministers (MISC 7), once more in extreme secrecy from both public and the remainder of the Cabinet; in his initial briefing on the handling of nuclear deterrence matters, the Cabinet Secretary asked Mrs Thatcher if she 'propose[d] to confine it to yourself and the three Departmental Ministers directly concerned?'<sup>2</sup> She did. Simultaneously, the government was establishing its position on the Long Range Tactical Nuclear Forces and the SALT II treaties which were key to NATO's evolving nuclear strategy.

SALT II was a bilateral arms control agreement between the USA and USSR, and the UK's interests were mostly in ensuring that the agreement neither included British weapons in the totals, or inhibited transfer of nuclear technology from the USA to UK. Early advice to Pym (now Secretary of State for Defence) on the Long-Range Tactical Nuclear Forces suggested that;

'... a deployment of GLCMs in the UK could well offer an additional focus for demonstrations by CND-style and perhaps environmentalist critics. This likelihood, and the desirability of

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<sup>1</sup> CONSERVATIVE PARTY 1979. Conservative General Election Manifesto. London. chapter 6

<sup>2</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum (Hunt (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A09454 'The Future of the Deterrent' dated 4 May 79. TNA 19/14.



keeping its impact to a minimum, must feature among the factors affecting the selection of sites and planning of dispersal patterns and any off-base exercises. (We would also need to have it in mind in framing a public presentation of decisions, for example perhaps in stressing Vulcan replacement rather than dramatic novelty.)<sup>3</sup>

Pym seems not to have taken this advice to heart;

‘His reaction was not quite that he saw no difficulty, but that he saw none of an order which should be allowed to deflect us from a GLCM deployment if that was otherwise clearly the right course on the grounds of national security.’<sup>4</sup>

As will be shown below, Pym was in fact convinced that the public would need to be educated about the case for the replacement of Polaris, but his successes were limited and the challenges manifold.

Cabinet Office preparations for Mrs Thatcher’s first MISC 7 on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1979 emphasised, on the one hand, the absolute imperative for secrecy, and on the other, the need to consult more widely in order to further inform the decision. The initial briefing by the Cabinet Secretary (John Hunt) to the Prime Minister on the nuclear deterrent outlined the history of the Polaris force, its vulnerability to the evolving ABM systems, and the Chevaline project, including its £935M cost. It considered the ongoing UK/US collaboration on the Polaris project and predicted that the missiles, systems and submarines will remain sound until the mid-1990s.

‘... it should therefore be possible to maintain the present force in operation until the mid-1990s, albeit with increasing costs and technical problems, ... If we are to develop a successor system, it will need to enter into service by the mid-1990s.’<sup>5</sup>

In his follow-up briefing, Hunt succinctly elaborated the key themes of the Duff Mason report and highlighted the key decisions necessary. He also observed that the;

‘... general approach is on orthodox lines, but it represents an attempt, for the first time in recent years, to work out a concept for the United Kingdom deterrent. ... Given the context in which the study was commissioned, the absence of any conclusions is deliberate; the intention was to provide Ministers with arguments on either side of the basis of which they could reach a decision in principle.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> MOD Memorandum DUS(P) 436/79 'Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces' dated 6 Jul 79.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. paragraph 2

<sup>5</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum (Hunt (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A09454 'The Future of the Deterrent' dated 4 May 79. TNA 19/14.

<sup>6</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum (Hunt (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A09588 'The Future of the Deterrent' dated 18 May 79. TNA PREM 19/14.

This clearly suggests that the Cabinet Office viewed the key decisions about Polaris replacement as not technical in nature, but intensely political. Hunt then explicitly linked the technical with the political; '... what constitutes unacceptable damage and thus what would deter attack on the United Kingdom are essentially matters of political judgement.' He described the close linkage between the targeting requirement (Chevaline was procured to meet the perceived need to be able to threaten Moscow),<sup>7</sup> necessary performance criteria and therefore cost; 'The cost of continuing to provide this capability in a successor system is likely to be very high.'<sup>8</sup>

It is in Hunt's paper that the close link between highly classified nuclear targeting considerations, and public statements about policy and system procurement are first highlighted for the Conservative government.

Discussion of the Polaris Successor continued throughout the Autumn in MISC 7, with the main issues being technical. Although there was no debate in the committee about whether the UK required a nuclear deterrent, there was a very pertinent exchange debate between Mrs Thatcher and Hunt's replacement as Cabinet Secretary, Robert Armstrong, in her preparations for a November meeting of MISC 7. In his initial preparatory briefing for the PM for this meeting, Armstrong had written:

'In considering this report I believe that the Ministerial Group will wish to concentrate on three questions. These are:- (a) Should there be a British strategic nuclear deterrent in succession to Polaris? ... ' Mrs Thatcher noted by hand on the brief; 'We have decided there should.'<sup>9</sup>

Despite this definitive clarification, Armstrong's subsequent briefing on suggested conduct of the meeting returns to the issue repeatedly, suggesting he views it as an important aspect of the decision; and it is worth considering in substance;

'This is a key meeting. The likely decisions will affect our most important means of defence over the next 40 years and thereby the basis of our international military posture ...

2. ... The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Defence have (I understand) reached effective agreement on the formula proposed by Sir John Hunt ... under which the Defence

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<sup>7</sup> For detailed consideration of the 'Moscow Criterion' and its impact on nuclear deterrence policy in the UK, see STODDART, K. 2014a. *Facing Down the Soviet Union; Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons 1976-1983*, Palgrave Macmillan., BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2012a. The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Beliefs, Culture, and Status (Part Two). *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23, 493-516. and STODDART, K. 2008. Maintaining the 'Moscow Criterion': British Strategic Nuclear Targeting 1974-1979. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31, 897-924.

<sup>8</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum (Hunt (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A09588 'The Future of the Deterrent' dated 18 May 79. TNA PREM 19/14.

<sup>9</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister A0500 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent' dated 29 Oct 79. TNA PREM 19/14.

Budget ... to 1983-83 is fixed at the (lower) Treasury figures and the cost of replacing Polaris is treated as a charge on the Contingency reserve. This will not have been reported to the Cabinet by 5th November. ...

3. You may wish to conduct the meeting in three stages:

(i) Procedural points

(ii) The answers to the three questions in my minute of 29th October -

(a) Do we retain our strategic deterrent?

(b) What should it be capable of doing?

(c) Which weapon should we choose? ....

5. Your Luxembourg speech made pretty clear that we could continue with our deterrent after Polaris; and it was MISC 7's starting point, at its first meeting in May, that the Government was fully committed to doing so. But the Chancellor was not invited to that meeting; and the seriousness of the issue is such that your colleagues should at least be invited to reaffirm that we do wish to stay in what is, for us, a pretty big league. Mr Pym could be invited to begin, on the basis of his paper.

6. That paper deals summarily with the question, on the basis of previous discussion. Are you content to do that? Or do you want to invite the Committee to go over the fundamental questions again? [Mrs Thatcher in hand wrote 'NO' against this question] I suppose these questions are: What good has it done us so far to be in the strategic deterrent league? Given the decline in our world position in other respects, will it do us enough good to stay in the league from the 1990s to justify the cost of the burden this programme represents in the meantime? How important is it for us, and for our NATO Allies, that we should continue to maintain our own strategic deterrent capacity? How conceivable is it that we may want to use, or to be able to threaten to use, a British strategic deterrent independently of the United States, either in our national interest or in that of the NATO Alliance? In terms of cost-effectiveness as a contribution to our own and our Allies' security, is this preferable to use of a corresponding amount of resources on more conventional weapons? ... I suspect that answer to all these questions is in effect that, having been in the league for thirty years, it is inconceivable for a Government committed as this is to the maintenance of national defence to take a decision which would irrevocably take us out of that league. But it may still be right to have asked, and agreed upon answers to, questions of this kind.<sup>10</sup>

At paragraph 2, Armstrong draws attention to the financial manipulation that was

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<sup>10</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A0547 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent' dated 2 Nov 79. TNA PREM 19/14.

required to obscure necessary 'long lead' financial commitments for the Polaris successor from Cabinet. Such 'economy with the truth'<sup>11</sup> was not new; after all Mrs Thatcher's government had inherited the Top Secret Chevaline programme and its huge (and as yet undisclosed) budget, but the suggested use of the Contingency reserve would perpetuate this 'economy' within Cabinet and, by extension, Parliament that had characterised British nuclear policy decision-making since Attlee.

Paragraphs 3, 5 and 6 readdress his basic question – should there be a replacement? Armstrong outlines a series of not unreasonable questions and concludes paragraph 6 with the point that even if the answers to these are not in fact core to the decision to replace Polaris, the government would do well to have articulated the factors and considered how to respond when others (inevitably) asked the questions. These questions were regularly reflected in the increasingly polarised discourse on nuclear deterrence for the remainder of the Parliament.

By early November, MISC 7 discussion was focused on the relative merits of submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) systems and submarine launched cruise missile (SLCM) systems. Air launched cruise missiles had been ruled out as an option for a strategic nuclear deterrent at the September meeting.<sup>12</sup> The decision to procure Trident C4 was taken in the delayed MISC 7 meeting in December, although the minutes of that meeting remain classified<sup>13</sup> and it is not clear if Armstrong's fundamental questions were addressed. They certainly played no part in government preparation for the subsequent parliamentary scrutiny processes, nor the public discourse. A Guardian article of 1 November 1979 'UK Ready to Buy Trident Missiles' speculated;

'... if Mrs Thatcher and her Ministers do endorse the Trident plan next week, its public debate is likely to be vigorous ... The Government is bound to be challenged as to why Britain still needs an 'independent' nuclear deterrent, why the Polaris system cannot be modernised and, above all, why the deterrent force should not consist of much cheaper nuclear armed cruise missiles of the kind we are in any case proposing to have based in this country ... as part of the collective plan to modernise NATO's so-called theatre nuclear weapons.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sir Robert Armstrong was credited with coining the phrase during the 'Spycatcher' Trial in 1986 –in his original use, it does not mean telling lies, simply not revealing the whole truth...

<sup>12</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister A0500 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent' dated 29 Oct 79. TNA PREM 19/14.

<sup>13</sup> August 2016: Mrs Thatcher's preparations and briefing notes are available (PREM 19/14) but the Cabinet Office Records of the meeting remain embargoed.

<sup>14</sup> GUARDIAN. UK Ready to Buy Trident Missiles. 1 November 1979.

The same article stated that a; 'decision has been taken at the Ministry of Defence that Britain's independent nuclear deterrent should be replaced by a fleet of five submarines carrying American Trident missiles fitted with British warheads. A recommendation will be submitted next week to a special Cabinet sub-committee, chaired by Mrs Thatcher, which is expected to endorse the plan.'<sup>15</sup> Outside MISC 7, extreme secrecy was being exercised until a decision had been made and publicity became inevitable. Armstrong briefed the Prime Minister on efforts to stem the leak, assessing that there was little an able defence correspondent could not have picked up, but '... What is new, and in the light of President Carter's message extremely damaging, is the reference to the fact that the subject is shortly to go a Committee of Ministers ...'<sup>16</sup> Negotiations with the US authorities were ongoing throughout the Autumn and in August, Wade-Gery of the Cabinet Office led a visit of a small team of officials to Washington to agree the outline of the deal with President Carter's deputy National Security Advisor Dr Aaron.

The guidance on the publicity to be afforded this visit was classified Top Secret UK Eyes Alpha. This was the same classification as the MISC 7 main working papers considering detailed UK nuclear policy and capabilities, SSBN patrol reports and Polaris targeting instructions. Top Secret is defined as: the '... most sensitive information requiring the highest levels of protection from the most serious threats. For example where compromise could cause widespread loss of life or else threaten the security or economic wellbeing of the country or friendly nations.'<sup>17</sup> UK Eyes Alpha further limits access to UK nationals only.

Whilst the UK considered the Polaris Successor in utmost secrecy, NATO was dealing with proposals to modernise the Alliance theatre nuclear weapons capabilities as a response to the Soviet deployment of SS20 intermediate range nuclear missiles into Eastern Europe. Despite considerably more public debate across Europe about the NATO strategy, the British government persisted in dealing with these issues as substantially unrelated to the strategic deterrent and the Polaris successor decision.<sup>18</sup> This myopic insouciance is all the more surprising given the advice received from Quinlan (MOD Deputy Under Secretary (Policy)) in July and the degree of sensitivity to security aspects of the negotiations for Trident.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister A0548 dated 2 November 1979. TNA PREM 19/14.

<sup>17</sup> BR 4005 Manual of Naval Security Vol 1. TNA ADM 234/1134. and Government Security Classifications April 2014. Cabinet Office.

<sup>18</sup> MOD Memorandum Blelloch to DUS(P) MOD dated 6 Aug 79. TNA DEFE 24/2122.

## The NATO Theatre Nuclear Forces issue

The Soviet Union had begun deploying medium-range SS-20 ground-launched ballistic nuclear missiles in Eastern Europe between 1976 and 1978.<sup>19</sup> The Soviet move was carefully calibrated in order to challenge the cohesion of the Alliance on this highly emotive issue and was accompanied by an aggressive Soviet media campaign highlighting the withdrawal of 20,000 Soviet troops from Eastern Europe and an offer to reduce tactical nuclear warheads in Europe, if no new NATO systems were deployed. The challenge to Alliance cohesion was readily perceived; Pym advised Mrs Thatcher that;

‘The modernisation of long-range theatre nuclear forces is of high importance to NATO defence. It has moreover become of political significance reaching beyond the strictly defence considerations; it is now a key test of NATO's collective will to ensure its security.’<sup>20</sup>

As the autumn progressed, it became apparent that the Netherlands was particularly disposed towards immediate arms control measures based on the status *quo ante*, effectively fixing the tactical nuclear warhead balance at a point that included the Soviet SS20s. This was not a dominant view in the Alliance, but the Dutch Parliament openly discussed the issues and the anti-nuclear and environmentalist lobbies picked up on the issue.

NATO's response options were being considered in the newly formed High Level Group (HLG), within which UK and US officials identified that the Dutch position would be the key to acceptance of the 'Integrated Decision Document'. The US deputy National Security Adviser, David Aaron, toured the capitals of the putative host nations (UK, Federal Republic of Germany, Holland, Belgium and Italy) lobbying for a robust response to the Soviet campaign. British officials informed him that '... while public presentation was perhaps less of a problem in the UK than in

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<sup>19</sup> SS20 were able to threaten all of Europe's capitals while not posing a threat to the USA, thus upsetting what was considered a regional and strategic balance by many in NATO. This presented a potential where the Soviet Union could 'de-couple' a threat to Europe from a threat to the USA, and thus reduce the likelihood of US strategic retaliation and the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrence strategy. In response, the Alliance agreed the 'twin track' approach – one of the most sophisticated arms control measures of the Cold War: NATO linked deployment of similarly capable NATO systems (Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM – Tomahawk) and Pershing Medium Range Ballistic Missiles) to the deployment of SS20, but offered to negotiate arms control measures with the USSR on the assumption that unless the SS20 were removed, the NATO systems would be deployed. The NATO strategy led to the deployment of GLCM in the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and West Germany, and Pershing II MRBM in West Germany, leading to intense opposition from anti-nuclear campaigners across Europe. Ultimately, however, the twin-track led to the successful Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987; the only arms control treaty to achieve withdrawal of a complete category of nuclear missiles.

<sup>20</sup> MOD Memorandum Pym to Thatcher MO 13/1/34 'NATO Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces' dated 5 Jul 79. TNA DEFE 25/335.

some other countries, it nevertheless needed to be handled carefully and the question of the basing facilities was particularly sensitive.<sup>21</sup> The HLG plan was considered by MISC 7 in early December and it was agreed that the Defence Secretary would make a statement on the outcome of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) to Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> December prior to Mrs Thatcher's visit to Washington on 17<sup>th</sup> December. Armstrong suggested that this might be an opportune moment to inform Cabinet of the decision to procure Trident, but highlighted the American desire for continued discretion.<sup>22</sup> In the event, Pym reported the NPG outcome to Cabinet, but not the Trident decision. NATO announced the 'twin track' decision on 12<sup>th</sup> December. US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance announced; 'I believe that our governments can be proud of this memorable achievement and that the free people of the alliance will show overwhelming support for the decisions made here today.'<sup>23</sup> Vance misjudged European public opinion; according to one CND history;

'... even as the decision was being announced, 40,000 people were gathering at the NATO headquarters in Brussels to protest; the antimissile movement turned out to be the greatest wave of protest that had taken place in western Europe since World War II.'<sup>24</sup>

The CND campaign selectively used information from this speech, disparaging the deployment of Pershing II and GLCM as 'first strike'<sup>25</sup> weapons, but ignoring, as Vance put it;

'The modernization decision that we have made here also makes it possible for us to withdraw 1,000 nuclear warheads from Europe. In addition to this reduction, for each of these weapons we deploy, we

<sup>21</sup> MOD Loose Minute DUS(P) 619/79 'TNF Modernisation - Visit by Mr David Aaron' 22 Oct 79. TNA PREM 19/14

<sup>22</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister A0940 'Modernisation of NATO's Long range Theatre Nuclear Forces and the Replacement of Polaris' dated 12 Dec 1979. TNA PREM 19-0159.

<sup>23</sup> VANCE, C. 1979. *Statement to the Press after NATO High Level Group Special Meeting 12 Dec 79* [Online]. US State Dept., Available: <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/vance5688.htm> [Accessed 25 Oct 2015].

<sup>24</sup> HUDSON, K. 2007. *CND Now More than Ever; The Story of A Peace Movement*. Kindle ed.: Matrix Digital Publishing Kindle Location 2192

<sup>25</sup> First strike is a strategic concept where one side has the ability to use sufficient precision weapons with enough confidence that he could successfully destroy an opponent's ability to retaliate, before the opponent could react; it is occasionally referred to as a 'disarming first strike'. A credible first strike capability requires 3 capabilities; the first strike weapons must be accurate enough to target the opponent's nuclear weapons to a high degree of assurance - both Pershing and GLCM were capable of this degree of accuracy; there must be sufficient first strike weapons to target all of the opponent's weapons simultaneously - the 464 GLCM and 108 Pershing II missiles announced could target around ten per cent of the 5000 Soviet nuclear weapons in Europe and; the opponent must not have an assured second strike capability such as submarine-launched ballistic missiles which are immune to first strike - the USSR had SSBNs based in the Northern Fleet and the Pacific. (Missile numbers quoted in: GOLDHAMER, J. 1983. *The Economist's Perception of the US-Soviet Strategic Balance: An update for 1979-1981*. Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation. Table 1)

will withdraw one existing weapon from Europe. Thus, far from increasing NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons, our decisions will result in a significant reduction in the size of NATO's overall nuclear stockpile in Europe.<sup>26</sup>

NATO deployment of Cruise missiles, at the same time as the decision to replace Polaris, was to prove a demanding period for British nuclear policy formulation.

Mrs Thatcher met with President Carter in December and verbally agreed the outline terms of the arrangement. The formal exchange of letters was further delayed at Carter's request in order to avoid ramifications for the SALT II treaty which was about to be ratified – he was concerned that the USSR would seek further concessions if it was announced that the UK would deploy Trident. Specifically, he also requested that the proposals should not be put to the British Cabinet. When asked if the negotiations on the exchange could continue in the meantime;

'Dr Brzezinsky [US National Security Advisor] indicated that this would be negotiable, provided that discussion was confined to the same restricted group of as had been involved hitherto. It would not, however, be possible for technical discussions to proceed without extending the circle of those involved, which the President did not want to do.'<sup>27,28</sup>

This note was classified Top Secret, and the implicit ramifications of a leak for SALT II seem to vindicate that level of discretion, although it does say little for the perception of British security that Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff were explicitly excluded. In Spring 1980, there was a further delay to the announcement as the US administration sought to avoid perceptions of over-reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup>

### **Public engagement**

Pym had long advocated a more open public approach and debate in the Commons and an adjournment debate on nuclear defence issues had been scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> January. Pym opened the debate by indicating that it was the first such since 1964 and that he would concentrate on nuclear issues and nuclear policy. He considered

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<sup>26</sup> VANCE, C. 1979. *Statement to the Press after NATO High Level Group Special Meeting 12 Dec 79* [Online]. US State Dept., Available: <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/vance5688.htm> [Accessed 25 Oct 2015].

<sup>27</sup> CABINET OFFICE A01003 Note of a Meeting in the Oval Office, the White House, Washington DC, on Monday 17th December 1979. TNA PREM 19-0159.

<sup>28</sup> The USSR invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and the US Senate did not ratify SALT II, although both 'sides' did observe its restrictions.

<sup>29</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Wade-Gery (Cabinet Office) to Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) B05909 'Polaris Replacement' dated 11 Feb 80. TNA PREM 19-0159.



that; 'the arguments surrounding nuclear strategy neither should be, nor can be, taken for granted. They require constant rethinking and restating, and I feel sure that it is right for the House to play its part in that process.'<sup>30</sup> Having opened with a brief precis of NATO strategy, in a 'world where nuclear weapons exist', against a 'potential adversary who has built up ... a vast – and offensively structured – apparatus of military power...' Pym described NATO's modernisation programme, in particular the need for a modern capability to strike the Soviet homeland from within Europe. He informed Parliament of the decision to base 160 American ground-launched cruise missiles in the UK, and sketched over the arrangements for political control of these missiles. He covered the UK contribution to NATO deterrence, and then described the technical aspects of the systems involved.

Pym also described the Chevaline upgrade to the Polaris system and, for the first time, the £1000M cost was publicly disclosed. He carefully avoided any reference to specific Anglo-American negotiations and agreements, referring only to the commitment of the US to cooperate in provision of UK strategic nuclear deterrent. In closing, he described the likely costs of replacement of Polaris in language that suggested it was an inevitable expenditure; 'That is, of course, still a massive demand on our limited resources, but we must keep it in the perspective of what modern defence inescapably costs.'<sup>31</sup> When faced with questions, he indicated that cruise missiles had been considered and rejected as strategic deterrence options, and that there was no fixed timetable for the decision on the Polaris replacement.

Mr Rodgers, the Labour defence spokesman, mocked the 'enthusiasm of the then Opposition for debating such matters and their lack of enthusiasm as displayed since May 1979.'<sup>32</sup> He then looked forward to the work of the Defence Select Committee in enabling the Commons to have a better-informed debate than would otherwise be the case. Rodgers queried '...whether it is wise to replace Polaris at all. To me, that remains an open question which should be subject to debate.'<sup>33</sup>

The Labour MP John Cartwright followed this with:

'The Secretary of State for Defence put a rather different point of view on 18 December. He said, 'I want the greatest possible discussion about the matter.' ... We are left with a gap in our information, and that cannot be filled in the time available to the new Select Committee on defence. .... The House will fail in its duty to the nation if the Government are not pressed to provide the basic

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<sup>30</sup> HC Debate 24 January 1980. HANSARD vol 977 cc672-784. Col 673

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. col 683

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. col 686

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. col 692

information needed to decide whether their judgments are correct.<sup>34</sup>

The Times reported the exchanges under the headline; 'More Information Must be Given'<sup>35</sup> though this reflected more the tenor of the debate than an editorial opinion at that time. The Daily Express was more partisan; 'Maggie's Cold War – H Weapons give boost to Polaris Fleet'<sup>36</sup> enthusiastically reporting the increase in the capability of the Polaris fleet and the plan to position Cruise Missiles in the UK. The Times considered the subsequent House of Lords debate under the headline 'Implications of decision to buy Trident'<sup>37</sup> and cited six Lords who argued against it, including Lord Carver (ex Chief of Defence Staff). Viscount Trenchard, the Minister of State for Defence, was quoted at length, which provided a balanced account of the Lords' debate, but with no editorial comment *per se*.

Inevitably, increased public interest and debate ensued, although they were substantially unencumbered by government intervention. In public correspondence reminiscent of Spaight's during the Second World War, the recently retired Chief of Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Cameron refuted arguments made against Trident by Lord Carver in letters to the Times<sup>38</sup> but there was limited government intervention in the public discourse. CND had been nearly moribund since the mid 1960s. In the late 1970s anti-nuclear opposition had experienced a resurgence in interest across Europe, the USA and USSR because of NATO's discussions about tactical nuclear forces and the increasingly bellicose rhetoric of the USSR and USA. Regardless of official distinctions, NATO Tactical Nuclear Forces and the Polaris Successor were regarded as a single issue by CND.

### **The Polaris Successor Decision**

During the Ministerial discussion about how to announce the Polaris Successor decision which had been running throughout June and July, there had been an extended debate on how much about the decision itself, the nuclear deterrent and the Trident system, to reveal publicly. In keeping with his long standing opinion, Pym advocated an official publication which set out as much of the arguments and case for the Successor as possible. Pym's original draft of a public 'Open Government Document'<sup>39</sup> (substantially written by Quinlan) was circulated to the Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor on 10<sup>th</sup> June.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. col 711

<sup>35</sup> TIMES. More information must be given., 25 Jan 1980, p.8.

<sup>36</sup> DAILY EXPRESS. Maggie's Cold War. 25 January 1980, p.1.

<sup>37</sup> TIMES. Implications of decision to buy Trident. 26 February 1981.

<sup>38</sup> CAMERON, A. C. M. 1980. Maintaining Britain's Nuclear Capability. *Times*, 9 May 1980.

<sup>39</sup> MOD Memorandum Pym (MOD) to Prime Minister MO 18/1/1, 'Polaris Successor' dated 10 Jun 80. In: MOD (ed.). TNA PREM 19/417.

Whitelaw responded: 'My only question is whether in these circumstances we are wise to expose as many of the details as you do. You may feel it is essential. I do, however, have the feeling that in this field it is wise to give as little information as is possible.'<sup>40</sup> Carrington was generally content but suggested amending the text on the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in order to remain sensitive to the NPT Conference later in 1980<sup>41</sup> and Howe sat on the fence; '... I am inclined to wonder whether it is really wise to say quite so much. We would expose a lot of flank. On the other hand, I recognise that Francis Pym is committed to publishing some account of the basis for our decision, and to say too little would be counter-productive.'<sup>42</sup> The Prime Minister agreed with Pym's intent, but also with the need to provide rather less information.<sup>43</sup>

Obviously the Labour opposition knew that a decision on a replacement for Polaris must be looming, even if they knew no details, and regularly pushed for a debate prior to any decision. On 10<sup>th</sup> July 1980, just prior to the summer recess of Parliament, The Leader of the House was repeatedly pressed to declare a date for a debate on the Polaris Successor, to which he repeatedly responded that he had received no request for a debate on nuclear policy.

Ideally, the announcement was to be timed to enable the formal notification of key NATO allies in particular France, West Germany and Italy, once formal agreement with the USA have been achieved. Although the original MOD intent had been for the Prime Minister to announce the decision to the House, in the event, she decided that the Secretary of State for Defence should make the announcement.<sup>44</sup> Despite the careful choreography, things did not quite go according to plan. Early in the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> July, two days before the planned announcement in the UK of the exchange of letters, the UK Embassy in Washington reported that the Senate Republican Leader, Senator Baker, had informed ABC television that the US administration had agreed to sell Trident to the UK.<sup>45</sup> In order to avoid the embarrassment of having Parliament find out such a crucial decision from foreign

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<sup>40</sup> MOD Unreferenced personal memorandum Prime Minister to Pym (MOD) 'Polaris Successor' dated 11 June 1980. TNA PREM 19/417.

<sup>41</sup> FCO Memorandum Carrington (FCO) to Prime Minister PM/80/45, Polaris Successor: dated 12 June 1980. *In*: FCO (ed.). TNA PREM 19/417.

<sup>42</sup> TREASURY Unreferenced personal memorandum Polaris Successor; Memorandum dated 16 June 1980. *In*: EXCHEQUER (ed.). TNA PREM 19/417.

<sup>43</sup> CABINET OFFICE Unreferenced memorandum Polaris Successor: Memorandum dated 17 June 1980. TNA PREM 19/417

<sup>44</sup> MOD Unreferenced memorandum Whitmore (Cabinet Office) to Norbury (MOD) Polaris Successor dated 7 July 1980. TNA PREM 19/417.

<sup>45</sup> FCO Telegram 2517 of 14 July 1980. TNA PREM 19/417.

media, the timetable for informing Parliament had to be rushed forward, and Cabinet needed to be informed beforehand.

The full Cabinet was therefore informed, in a manner reminiscent of the way Attlee informed his Cabinet in 1948 of the effort to build a British atomic bomb, and of Churchill's announcement of the H-bomb project in 1955, on the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> July 1980. Nott recounted the meeting;

'... we were simply informed by the Prime Minister that a decision had been taken in conjunction with the Americans to modernise the deterrent with the introduction of Trident. I was shocked that the cabinet had neither been given any facts nor consulted on the issue. I protested. I said that I thought it was an unsatisfactory way of conducting the Government's business, not least because this was a matter of fundamental national importance. ... The whole matter took up about ten minutes of Cabinet time.'<sup>46</sup>

Pym then made the statement to the House, on the afternoon of 15<sup>th</sup> July and the announcement benefitted from the previous careful Cabinet Office planning, involving simultaneous briefings of the media, and a side debate among officials about whether the MOD needed to have 'more written material prepared (eg some sort of 'Daily Mail' counterpart to the 'Daily Telegraph' style of the Departmental Memorandum).'<sup>47</sup> Pym's statement included the cost effectiveness of Trident, UK independent operational control, the industrial impact of 70% of the costs being spent in the UK, and portrayed Trident as;

'an essential reaffirmation of our national commitment to security and to co-operation with our allies under the North Atlantic Treaty. The United Kingdom's continuing possession of a strategic nuclear capability remains a major element in our deterrent strategy, and a major contribution to the defence of Western Europe. ... It is designed solely to preserve peace and to prevent war.'<sup>48</sup>

The shadow Defence Secretary, Rodgers, responded;

'We have asked, first, for a full and informed debate, which has not taken place. ... There are those who will say that it could be a contempt of the House for the Secretary of State to make an announcement of this sort before the Select Committee and the House have had the opportunity to discuss the matter. ... We believe that the case for buying Trident has not been made, and we cannot

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<sup>46</sup> NOTT, J. 2002. *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, London, Politicos.

<sup>47</sup> MOD Unreferenced memorandum Norbury (PUS at MOD) to Whitmore (Cabinet Office) MO18/1/1 Polaris Successor dated 23 June 1980. TNA PREM 19/417.

<sup>48</sup> HC Debate 15 July 1980; Statement on the Strategic Nuclear Deterrent. HANSARD vol 988 cc1235-51. Col 1236

approve it.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly the Opposition felt that the ability of Parliament to hold the executive to account had been circumvented in this case.

Pym's Open Government Document 'The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force' (OGD 80/23) was published in July 1980. This document was a significant break with previous governments' tendencies to keep official deterrence thinking out of the public eye. It comprised five sections: The Policy Background included an elementary description of NATO nuclear deterrence strategy and the unique role of the UK strategic forces in it, in particular, the concept of the 'second centre of decision making' and the related concepts of credibility of a deterrence capability and resolve to use it. Section II; General Considerations on System Choice described the philosophy behind UK targetting policy, and the related benefits of an invulnerable retaliatory strike capability (SLBMs such as Polaris and Trident). It then considered the timing and procurement of the Polaris Successor, and emphasised the risk and cost benefits of close cooperation with the USA.

Section III; System Options considered the various options that were potentially available; air-launched cruise missiles, submarine-launched cruise missiles and various SLBM, including Polaris with a further Chevaline-style life extension programme, collaboration with the French SLBM programme, Poseidon and Trident. It starts with an objective assessment of the pros and cons of the available platforms and concludes; 'For all these reasons, nuclear propelled ocean-going submarines remain the best launch platforms for a British missile force.'<sup>50</sup> The next section amounted to cost benefits analyses of submarine launched cruise missiles and submarine launched ballistic missiles. It describes in surprising detail the capabilities and limitations of the various existing ballistic missile systems and the existing and potentially-available cruise missile options. Any one of these factors in isolation could (and would) be used to argue for and against any one system, but the paper assesses the complex relationship between missile capability (range, destructive potential and post-launch vulnerability to intercept), platform vulnerability, platform numbers, cost and technological risk. Substantially, OGD 80/23 Sections I-III comprised a redacted version of the Duff-Mason report, with a consideration of the decision-making process added.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. col 1237

<sup>50</sup> UK GOVT 1980. The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force. London: HMSO.paragraph 33

The fourth section focused on Arms Control, always the parallel track for UK nuclear deterrence policy. 'Strong support for practical, balanced and verifiable arms control measures remains a key element in our approach to ensuring peace and security.'<sup>51</sup> It indicated that the UK supported the Non Proliferation Treaty and that replacement of an existing system was not incompatible with that treaty, nor the US-USSR SALT I and II treaties. The final section was Cost:

'...we assess the likely order of capital cost for a four-boat force, at today's prices, at around four-and-a-half to five billion pounds, spread over some fifteen years. ... There has rightly been widespread public interest in the effect which the replacement of the Polaris force will have upon other aspects of the defence programme. Money spent on this is not money spent on other things. ... Even after spending on the Trident force, the Government is still planning to spend more on conventional forces than it does now. The accommodation of large re-equipment programmes is a normal part of defence planning and budgeting. ... There are no easy comparisons to be made with other defence capabilities. There would be little point, for example, in diverting the full capital sum to buying more ships, tanks or aircraft which in the long term we could not afford to run and could not hope to man.'<sup>52</sup>

Ironically, OGD 80/23 seems to have considered many of Armstrong's proposed questions that were not addressed by MISC 7 above<sup>53</sup> although it did not address his first two questions; 'what good has it done us so far to be in the strategic deterrent league?' and; 'given the decline in our world position in other respects, will it do us enough good to stay in the league from the 1990s to justify the cost of the burden this programme represents in the meantime?' These questions are, however, biased towards the assumption that the UK retains a strategic nuclear deterrent for purposes other than deterrence.

In short, OGD 80/23 addressed the Polaris Successor decision logically and objectively and should have set most arguments to rest. That it did not was manifest in the increasingly vocal and influential anti-nuclear opposition. How much of the resulting anti-nuclear activity might have been avoided had the answers in the document been published in late 1979 or earlier in 1980, and debated in the Commons before a decision (for which the Conservatives had a comfortable majority in any case) could be taken is simply a matter for counterfactual

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. paragraph 58

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. paragraphs 63-67

<sup>53</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A0547 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent' dated 2 Nov 79. TNA PREM 19/14. Paragraph 6

speculation. But Armstrong's first two questions continue to bedevil UK nuclear policy decisions nearly 40 years later.

### **Trident: Post decision debate**

In June 1980, the Commons Defence Committee began its inquiry into the future of the UK's strategic weapons policy. Clearly it was not ideal to have the government publish its decision less than a month later, seven months before the Defence Committee reported; and there was an element of chagrin in the tone of the Report;

‘Subsequently in July 1980 the Government announced their decision to purchase the Trident missile system to replace Polaris; and on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1981 the House endorsed that decision. Since the House has voted, by 316 votes to 248, to endorse the choice of the Trident system, it is not for us to challenge the principle of that decision.’<sup>54</sup>

There was clearly a strenuous debate within the Committee about the tenor and ultimate recommendation of the final report. The draft report prepared by the Chairman (Sir John Langford-Holt (Conservative)) was challenged at the final Defence Committee meeting on this topic on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1981 by an alternative draft prepared by three of the five Labour members; Dr Gilbert, Mr Conlan and Mr George. After the first reading of each draft, the challenge was defeated by one vote (the eleven members voted exactly on party lines) and Langford-Holt's draft was adopted by the Committee.

The vigour and partisan nature of the Committee's debate was exemplified by the alternative final conclusions: the Committee's Final Report read;

‘We can see no case for the cancellation of the Trident programme by any future government. For Britain to abrogate the Trident agreement would be seen as withdrawal from the commitments to the alliance which have been constant since 1949. Cancellation would also have serious consequences for relations with the United States and other NATO allies...’<sup>55</sup>

The Alternative Report concluded; ‘We cannot recommend that any future Government continue the Trident programme.’<sup>56</sup>

The substantive contents of the reports are similar, although the Alternative Report included a section detailing the decision making process (outlined above) concluding; ‘...Parliament's role in the decision to procure a successor system to Polaris has been limited to endorsing a decision already taken. Decisions on

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<sup>54</sup> DEFENCE COMMITTEE 1981b. Fourth Report from the Defence Committee Session 1980-81. London: HMSO. Paragraph 1

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. page xxii para 54 (xv)

<sup>56</sup> DEFENCE COMMITTEE 1981a. Defence Committee Alternative Draft Report dated March 1981. London: HMSO. page lxiv paragraph 110(xx)

defence, and on Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent have historically been taken by a small elite of very senior Cabinet Ministers, Civil Servants and Service Chiefs, and this present decision was clearly no exception.<sup>57</sup>

'While we are excluded by the terms of reference set by the Committee from addressing the questions of principle, strategic doctrine and arms control involved in such major decisions of strategic nuclear policy, we are clear that any future comprehensive investigation of Britain's deterrent must deal with these matters in depth. Such investigations will have to consider whether or not these weapons are qualitatively different from other weapons. Any strategic nuclear exchange must inevitably generate radiation which is indiscriminate in both space and time, inflicting harm on non-combatants thousands of miles from the battlefield... However, if one concludes that nuclear deterrence is an ethically acceptable policy, it then becomes necessary to address specific strategic questions of how the threat is credibly to be made, and what political benefits are likely to accrue from the possession of a deterrent. Unfortunately, there has been much more said by British Governments about the *capability* to exercise a deterrent policy, than about precisely what policy *is*.<sup>58</sup>

The Labour members of the Defence Committee clearly wanted the opportunity to make conclusions and recommendation which were beyond the terms of reference of the Report, but in the event were outvoted by the Conservative committee members. There were other significant differences in interpretation of the same evidence throughout the two reports; and these were both symptomatic and typical of the increasingly dogmatic polarization of views over nuclear issues as the year progressed.

John Nott replaced Pym at Defence in January 1981. To the last, Pym had been seeking increased engagement with Parliament and had been in negotiations with the Leader of the House for debate on nuclear policy as soon as the Commons Defence Committee had completed its Report. However, when the report was further delayed to March Pym felt that the timetable for discussion related to procuring Trident D5 rather than the C4 variant could be delayed no further. If anything, Nott was even more enthusiastic about increasing education and understanding of nuclear deterrence matters than Pym had been and he immediately set in train a series of briefings for junior ministers and the Cabinet; although these were not popular with the Prime Minister. Nott also quickly set about

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. page xxxviii paragraph 8

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. page xl paragraphs 14-16



mastering his nuclear brief and wrote to the Prime Minister within a month of his arrival:

‘... we are losing the defence/deterrence argument at present. The CND campaign is gathering strength but much more importantly, there is a growing scepticism among a much wider and thinking section of the population about the correctness of the Trident decision. If we lose the Trident argument, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the wider defence posture of the government. I am convinced that Trident was the correct decision. But I must tell you that this is not, in my judgement, the general view of your Ministers, nor the unanimous view of the Ministry of Defence. Only the Defence Committee of our party seem free of doubts. We must win the argument in Whitehall, if we are to have any chance of convincing the outside world.’<sup>59</sup>

The debate on nuclear policy was scheduled for 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1981. Nott intended to open and close this debate because he felt that; ‘two Ministers can[not] be expected to have the time to master the strategic options and philosophical arguments...’<sup>60</sup> Mrs Thatcher did not agree, noting by hand on Nott’s memo; ‘I really think 2 Ministers should be able to master this’.

Nott’s hesitation in trusting part of the argument to one of his subordinate ministers is entirely in keeping with what had become routine for the oversight of deterrent policy, which was kept within small groups of very senior ministers and not even divulged to the full Cabinet until decisions had been made; Churchill had kept personal control of all communications about the Monte Bello test.

In the run-up to the debate Nott planned to schedule a number of in-depth interviews with television and the newspapers; ‘we have had many useful requests to enter a serious debate on the moral and strategic issues.’<sup>61</sup> This appears not to have happened until after the Parliamentary debate, with Nott announcing in an interview with the Times that he had ‘decided to wage a public relations battle to wean ‘innocent well-meaning people’ away from the ideas of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament...’<sup>62</sup>

In early 1981, despite coverage of the ongoing Commons Defence Committee hearings on the Future of the UK Strategic Weapons Policy, there was no apparent increase in government participation in the public discourse. In the meantime,

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<sup>59</sup> MOD Personal memorandum Nott (MOD) to Prime Minister MO18/1/1 ‘Trident, Public Attitudes’ dated 2 Feb 81. TNA PREM 19/555.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. paragraph 4

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. paragraph 5

<sup>62</sup> TIMES. Mr Nott to fight CND ideas. 20 May 1981.

opposition was growing and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was attracting more members, increasing membership tenfold between 1979 and the end of 1982.<sup>63</sup>

Nott opened the debate as planned, and took the non-technical issues of nuclear policy head-on:

'In ethical terms, the issues surrounding nuclear weapons are difficult, if not agonising. But in the debate between those who judge it better to keep those terrible weapons so as to use them as a shield for peace, and those who judge it better to discard them in order to maintain peace by some new, untried and, I would suggest, historically improbable route, the arguments are, I would suggest, on the side of deterrence. To engage the emotions—as the promoters of CND know very well—is an easy task. The showing of the film 'The War Game' in a village hall in the evening in the presence of young families has a predictable outcome. To argue the choices before us so as to engage the intellect is a much harder task.'<sup>64</sup>

Nott considered again the key decision factors outlined in the Duff-Mason report, and already covered in the previous debates; including in particular the relevance of an independent centre of decision-making, the minimum deterrent, and the irrelevance of parity with the Soviet Union. He concluded his introduction;

'Let me summarise the case that I am putting to the House. All of us fear and abhor the idea of war, and, above all, of nuclear war. All of us have a common aim—to prevent it, but it must be deterred away or negotiated away; it cannot simply be wished away. Britain has a distinctive role in deterrence—one that our allies acknowledge and welcome. It would be dangerous folly, in the world as it is, now to abandon that role. Much the best long-term way to sustain it at the strategic level is to build a new force around the Trident missile. That is, in absolute terms, not a cheap course, but the consequences of shirking it may one day prove unimaginably expensive.'<sup>65</sup>

The opposition response opened with a commentary on the timing of the debate;

'... I should like to comment on the timing of the debate, which—even given the Secretary of State's own tortuous logic—is most curious. The right hon. Gentleman gave lavish praise to the Select Committee on Defence, which has been studying this subject for several months. In a short time, it would have been able to assist us by publishing its conclusions.'<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> BYRNE, P. 1998. Nuclear Weapons and CND. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 51, 424-434. P426

<sup>64</sup> HC Debate 03 March 1981 Nuclear Deterrence. HANSARD vol 1000 cc137-224.col 137

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. col 144

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. col 145

Shadow defence spokesman, Mr John also had laudable intentions to face the key issues and eschew party politics, but as the debate unfolded, it became clear that there would be a bi-partisan division between Conservative and Labour on the nuclear deterrent for the first time since the deployment of Polaris. This was articulated in unequivocal terms by Labour MP Mr Snape;

'The Labour Party is against Trident. It ill-behoves the Conservative Party, which has cut, cut and cut again in relation to the social structure of this country, to spend a minimum—and Conservative Members know that it is a minimum—of £5 billion on the Trident project. Those of us who are concerned for not only the future of Britain but the future of our children are determined to ensure that there will be no Trident project in the future. My hon. Friends and I are the vanguard of a movement which has a great depth of feeling throughout the country.'<sup>67</sup>

The Commons endorsed the government's decision to maintain a strategic nuclear deterrent and the choice of the Trident missile system as the successor to the Polaris force. The technical factors changed again within the year as the USA decided to proceed with the early replacement of Trident C4 with the D5 variant. The UK was faced with almost the same decision once again – change the plan and provide a system which would remain compatible with that deployed by the USA for the design life, or take the (slightly) cheaper option and face increasing obsolescence and UK-specific upkeep costs.

### **Anti-Nuclear Protests**

Anti-nuclear opposition focused on both the Polaris Successor decision and the deployment of Cruise due for 1983. CND membership rose from 4000 in 1979 to 20,000 in 1981 and peaked at 100,000 in 1984. Turnout at the annual demonstrations in the early 1980s regularly topped a quarter of a million. Peace Camps, most notably at the proposed missile bases at Greenham Common and Molesworth, were established (although CND's involvement at Greenham was tangential). A wide variety of non-violent direct action took place, usually at military bases and nuclear weapons manufacturing/storage sites. Whilst some was organised by CND at a national level, the norm was for local initiatives, with national CND coordinating rather than directing.<sup>68</sup> The National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, which had voted in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament at its 1980 party conference, was one of the sponsors of the 1980 demonstration against

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. col 213

<sup>68</sup> BYRNE, P. 1998. Nuclear Weapons and CND. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 51, 424-434.

Cruise.<sup>69</sup>

Media coverage of the large march from Aldermaston to Trafalgar Square on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1980 tended to indicate that the media would find themselves unable to avoid taking a side in the rapidly polarizing debate. The Daily Express reported the rally itself objectively;

'More than 60,000 people turned up yesterday for the biggest nuclear disarmament demonstration since the 'Ban the Bomb' demo's of nearly 20 years ago. Their message was - no Cruise missiles! No Trident submarines! And a massive cut in arms. It was part of the re-birth of the peace movement and the support overwhelmed organisers.'<sup>70</sup>

But the same article also covered Michael Foot's statement to ITV's 'Weekend World';

'Mr Foot said that if he became Prime Minister he would send America's Cruise and Pershing missiles home - and get rid of Britain's independent nuclear weapons. ... Labour defence spokesman William Rogers came out against Mr Foot's plans. He said; 'Michael Foot's remarks were a plain statement of unilateralism. This is not the majority view of the parliamentary Labour Party. I do not believe it is the majority view of Labour voters. The people of this country believe that Britain should be properly defended.'<sup>71</sup>

The Daily Express also carried an Editorial considering Foot's commitment should he become Leader of the Labour party and potentially Prime Minister; 'He is prepared to do away with Britain's nuclear weapons unilaterally. So the man whom we are being invited to consider as our next Prime Minister is a man who would deprive Britain of the decisive weapon of the modern age.'<sup>72</sup> The Times editorial commented; '...the massive demonstration of support for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament on Sunday afternoon was an event of considerable political significance because it represented the revival of a movement whose activities had such an impact on British public affairs at the beginning of the 1960s. Why has this revival occurred now, and for how long can one expect it to last?'<sup>73</sup> The investigative documentary programme TV Eye<sup>74</sup> predicted that in the event of a war, the 'First Nuclear missiles would fall on Britain'. Interviewing Francis Pym - a

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<sup>69</sup> HUDSON, K. 2007. CND Now More than Ever; The Story of A Peace Movement. Kindle ed.: Matrix Digital Publishing Loc 2728

<sup>70</sup> DAILY EXPRESS. Foot in 'ban the bomb' storm. 27 Oct 1980, p.2.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> DAILY EXPRESS. A Disarming Michael Foot. 27 Oct 1980, p.8.

<sup>73</sup> TIMES. CND Marches Back. 28 Oct 1980, p.13.

<sup>74</sup> ITV 30 Oct 1980

relatively rare intervention by government - reporter Bob Southgate put together a map of American bases in Britain and asserted; 'The American presence here is so large and so important that the Russians could feel forced to attack these bases first.' Pym countered that 'both a British and American nuclear arsenal are vital to the defence of the West and to stop nuclear war becoming a reality.'<sup>75</sup>

The Times also sketched the reduction in interest in CND after the Cuban Missile crisis and suggested;

'... that has changed with the dispute over the Trident and Cruise missiles. The argument has been joined once again, with a public many of whom are totally uninfluenced by the previous debate and in circumstances that are different in a number of respects. One is that the international scene seems more forbidding... Recognition of this threat is seen in the new preoccupation with civil defence, which is both an acknowledgement of the danger and to many people an inadequate safeguard against it.'<sup>76</sup>

As well as the 'traditional' mass demonstrations, anti-nuclear protest took novel forms. At the end of a march from Cardiff, the Welsh group 'Women for Life on Earth' arrived on Greenham Common on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1981. They had marched with the intention of challenging the decision to site 96 Cruise nuclear missiles there by a debate with the Base Commander at RAF Greenham Common where the first detachment of GLCM would be based. On arrival they delivered him a letter which among other things stated 'We fear for the future of all our children and for the future of the living world which is the basis of all life'.<sup>77</sup> They were denied the debate, but took up residence in a makeshift camp on common ground adjoining the base, and remained there as a highly visible focus for the anti-nuclear protest movement until 2000, long after the GLCM had been withdrawn in 1991. Similar camps were established at RAF Molesworth, RAF Alconbury and at Faslane, the Clyde base from which the Polaris (and subsequently Trident) submarines operated.

These protests, committed to disrupting the daily working lives of the nuclear establishments, were highly disruptive and drew on tactics for anti-nuclear protests that had previously been avoided. Nuclear convoys leaving the bases were blockaded, tracked to their practice areas and had their training and exercises disrupted. Protesters would challenge security, cut wire fences and if they could

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<sup>75</sup> DAILY EXPRESS. Unlucky Break. 30 Oct 1980, p.27.

<sup>76</sup> TIMES. CND Marches Back. 28 Oct 1980, p.13.

<sup>77</sup> HIPPERSON, S. 2000. *Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp* [Online]. Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. Available: <http://www.greenhamwpc.org.uk> [Accessed 17 Apr 16 2016].

gain access, damage equipment within the perimeters of these facilities. This move to non-violent direct action meant that protesters were arrested, taken to court and occasionally imprisoned. Between March 1981 and 1984, over 5000 had been arrested across the country, with 1000 arrested at Greenham alone.<sup>78</sup>

### **Civil Defence**

There was little that could have made the public presentation of British nuclear policy more demanding in 1980, but the Home Office managed to find it. After the Strath Report in the 1950s, and continued decline throughout 1960s, Civil Defence had been put into a 'care and maintenance' state in 1968. However, shortly after election in 1979, the Home Office commissioned a report on 'Civil Preparedness' for the Defence Overseas Policy Committee Cabinet (DOPC) sub-committee. This Secret report highlighted the parlous state of civil defence and concluded that;

'There is widespread ignorance among the public, the media and officials of the threat and about protective measures. For many years the perception has been of immediate general nuclear war. Until recently this has led to apathy in the face of the appalling consequence and of the perceived inadequacy of steps taken to alleviate them ... A more open approach by government now would counter criticism of undue secrecy and a more informed public might change its attitude. It has been announced to Parliament that the pamphlet 'Protect and Survive' will be updated and placed on sale at the time the outcome of this review is announced.'<sup>79</sup>

Cabinet endorsed the Report's recommendations and advised that the Home Secretary should '... aim at an undramatic statement, in order not to arouse expectations which it would be impossible to fulfil.'<sup>80</sup>

Prior to the announcement of the Report, the Chief Whip was worried; 'I have not seen a copy of the paper which we shall be publishing, but I get the impression that it may cause a good deal of trouble by its inadequacy.'<sup>81</sup> In June, the DOPC agreed that the Home Secretary should announce the report and the recommendations, and that the 'financial problem should be considered further in the forthcoming Cabinet discussion of the 1980 Public Expenditure Survey with the aim of

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<sup>78</sup> HUDSON, K. 2007. CND Now More than Ever; The Story of A Peace Movement. Kindle ed.: Matrix Digital Publishing Loc 2565

<sup>79</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Cabinet Secretary to Cabinet OD(80)23 on 'Defence and Overseas Policy Committee Civil Home Defence' dated 18 Mar 80. TNA CAB 148/190. Paragraph 27 & 28

<sup>80</sup> CABINET OFFICE OD(80) 9th Meeting of Cabinet Defence Overseas Policy Committee Minutes Thursday 20 March 1980. TNA CAB 148/189.

<sup>81</sup> CONSERVATIVE PARTY Letter Jopling (Chief Whip) to Whitelaw (Home Secretary) Unreferenced 9 May 1980. TNA PREM 19/689.

implementing all of the Priority I and as many as possible of the Priority II measures.<sup>82</sup> This left Whitelaw in a nearly impossible position because the costs of most measures to protect the population from the consequences of a nuclear attack were prohibitively expensive, which was why they had been abandoned 30 years before and the focus had been shifted to deterring rather than fighting nuclear war. Whitelaw's task now was to present the cheap options as part of a package designed to educate an increasingly sceptical public.

'Protect and Survive; Civil Defence Manual of Basic Training'<sup>83</sup> was issued to the Civil Defence organization in 1950. It incorporated all of the previously published pamphlets on Basic Chemical Warfare, Firefighting, First Aid, Rescue, Protection from High Explosive Missiles and Atomic Warfare. It was reissued to the Civil Defence organization in various forms until 1968; Civil Defence handbook No 10 'Advising the Householder on Protection against Nuclear Attack' was issued in 1963.<sup>84</sup> It included advice on protective measures such as building a fall-out room under the stairs or the kitchen table. The decision to update and reissue Handbook No 10 as a public document in 1980 was a disaster for the public presentation of government nuclear deterrence policy.

Based on the experience of the 1960s, the decision to publish this document displayed a degree of ineptitude verging on the imbecilic. 'The government's civil defence pamphlet, Protect and Survive - perhaps the greatest own goal of the 1980s - was a gift to the peace movement...'<sup>85</sup> '[It] sought to persuade people that they could protect themselves against bombs with the power of millions of tons of dynamite by crouching under a table ...'<sup>86</sup> In response, CND produced a pamphlet entitled, Civil Defence: The Cruellest Confidence Trick, which described Protect and Survive as 'a mass confidence trick, a public fraud of the most heartless kind because it deals in human lives.'<sup>87</sup> This was closely followed by 'Protest and Survive'; CND seized on the title of the civil defence booklet and corrupted it into the campaign slogan 'Protest and Survive' which became ubiquitous, including as the

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<sup>82</sup> CABINET OFFICE OD(80) 18th meeting Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee Meeting minutes Tuesday 8 July 1980. TNA CAB 148/189.

<sup>83</sup> HOME OFFICE Protect and Survive: Civil Defence Manual of Basic Training 1950. London: HMSO.

<sup>84</sup> HOME OFFICE 1963. Civil Defence Handbook No 10: Advising the Householder on Protection Against Nuclear Attack. London: HMSO.

<sup>85</sup> KENT, B. 1999. Protest and Survive. *History Today*, 49, 14-16.

<sup>86</sup> MINNION, J. & BOLSOVER, P. 1983. *The CND Story*, London, Allison and Busby. p89

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in HUDSON, K. 2007. CND Now More than Ever; The Story of A Peace Movement. Kindle ed.: Matrix Digital Publishing (loc 2347)

title of a photograph of a skeleton reading 'Protect and Survive' which was displayed at the Tate Gallery.<sup>88</sup>

In 1980, the National Council for Civil Defence had started planning for Exercise Hard Rock, the first Civil Defence Exercise to consider a nuclear attack for nearly thirty years. However, after 24 of the 52 Councils refused to participate, Whitelaw was forced to cancel it. According to one press report, '...just 55 men and women are expected to handle all aspects of peacetime emergency and wartime emergency planning for more than 18,500,000 people ... In Tyneside, one person would look after 1,100,000 people.'<sup>89</sup> This Times article condemned CND for their attitude to civil defence and presented the government attempt to improve the situation favourably, but in doing so it highlighted the position baldly; either significant investment would be required, or the civil defence project was, as Kent put it, ludicrous.<sup>90</sup>

### **Fiction – the lie through which we tell the truth<sup>91</sup>**

The public reaction to Civil Defence was pretty much that which had been predicted in 1955 with the Strath Report – hence the extreme secrecy which still surrounded that document - and with the persistent concerns over The War Game in 1965. Fiction was also catching up and portraying fact; in the USA, a TV movie; 'The Day After' presented the aftermath of a nuclear war in the contemporary genre of a disaster movie, attracting the (then) largest ever TV audience (100m) when it was first screened in 1983. Prior to airing, there was intense debate in the USA whether it should be screened, with the '... Educators for Social Responsibility and others worried that the program might do children more harm than good.'<sup>92</sup> Immediately after the film was shown, 'Viewpoint' hosted Henry Kissinger, Robert McNamara, Brent Scowcroft, Carl Sagan and others for a 90 minute panel discussion with a live audience;

'Contrary to [host] Koppel's assumption that the ... 'simple-minded' film would do little more than encourage the nation to 'make policies by scaring ourselves to death,' the audience members demonstrated themselves to be calm, rational and well versed in international affairs. ... They were clearly not the easily frightened or

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<sup>88</sup> Photographer was Peter Kennard and the Tate reference is T12478.

<sup>89</sup> TIMES. CND 'puts people in danger'. 18 Dec 1981.

<sup>90</sup> KENT, B. 1999. Protest and Survive. *History Today*, 49, 14-16. P15

<sup>91</sup> Attributed to Albert Camus

<sup>92</sup> SANDMAN, P. & VALENTI, J. 1986. Scared stiff – or scared into action. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 1986, 12-16.



brainwashed masses conservatives feared or the eager converts  
hoped for by disarmament activists.<sup>93</sup>

In 1984, in the UK, the BBC produced 'Threads', depicting the destruction of Sheffield in a nuclear war. It was of the same genre as *The Day After*, although it depicted far more the run up to the war itself, but in doing so illustrated the utter irrelevance to the film's characters of the issue over which the war is fought. The film contained several aspects paying 'homage' to Watkins's 'The War Game'; the 'Authorities' come out very badly - shooting looters out of hand and holding summary trials, while the 'legitimate' local government is buried alive in a bunker and completely ineffectual. The film follows the daughter of the main characters born 5 months after the bomb to the point where she gives birth to a still-born baby at age 14. By this stage, British society has regressed to a neo-feudal state and her vocabulary is limited and sounds like medieval English.<sup>94</sup> Films such as these graphically portrayed the 'breakdown' of society which had so worried Strath. The concepts of protection portrayed in 'Protect and Survive' were most ruthlessly parodied in Raymond Briggs's book the 'When the Wind Blows' and the subsequent animated film of the same name.<sup>95</sup>

Contemporary 'teen' fiction in the early 1980s also exploited the aftermath of nuclear war for plot lines; *Children of the Dust*<sup>96</sup> recounts three individual stories in successive generations of survivors. There is no depiction of the nuclear war, or mention of its cause, simply the creeping inevitability of death caused by 'dust'. The government-imposed society fails because it cannot adapt to the new reality and simply tries to reinstate the previous technocracy and its long-defunct political legitimacy on the rest of the survivors. It is as bleak as any of the adult fiction initially, but where the adult fiction tends to leave the reader either witnessing the death of all of the characters, and perforce, mankind, this offers a more positive outlook, albeit in a pseudo-science-fiction vignette with mankind evolving into a more peaceful post-holocaust humanity. Similarly, *Brother in the Land*<sup>97</sup> focuses on the development of society immediately after a nuclear attack, suggesting it reverts to 'pre-Neanderthal'; once again suggesting Strath's 'breakdown'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> OVERPECK, D. 2012. 'Remember! it's Only a Movie!' Expectations and Receptions of *The Day After* (1983). *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 32, 267-292.

<sup>94</sup> *Threads*, 1984. Directed by JACKSON, M. London: BBC.

<sup>95</sup> *When the Wind Blows*, 1986. Directed by MURAKAMI, J.

<sup>96</sup> LAWRENCE, L. 1985. *Children of the Dust*, London, Random House.

<sup>97</sup> SWINDELLS, R. 1984. *Brother in the Land*, London, Oxford University Press.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p138

These children's books painted a very bleak appraisal of humanity in a state of nature, and implicitly challenged the assumption that defence of a particular model of society could justify a nuclear war.

Nott had noted three years before that the opposition to nuclear deterrence was essentially emotive, and that the government problem was how to counter it with rational points. He had missed the most important point though – the opposition set the parameters of the debate, and anchored it in these highly emotive depictions of the aftermath of nuclear war – the government could have simply agreed that all war (and nuclear war in particular) was a dreadful prospect and then described the various options to avoid it, of which nuclear deterrence seemed the most viable. For whatever reason, this line was not successfully pursued.

### **The Churches**

In April 1963, Pope John XXIII published the Papal Encyclical 'Pacem in Terris' which stated;

'Justice, right reason and consideration for human dignity and life urgently demand that the arms race should cease; that the stockpiles which exist in various countries should be reduced equally and simultaneously by the parties concerned; that nuclear weapons should be banned; and finally that all come to an agreement on a fitting programme of disarmament, employing mutual and effective controls.'<sup>99</sup>

This directive to the World's Catholics had little impact on national nuclear deterrence policies, but it set a precedent that had significant effect later.

With concern mounting over the stand-off in Europe over the Long Range Tactical Nuclear forces in the late 1970s and early 1980s, pastoral concerns overcame political reticence and a number of churches chose to voice opinions on nuclear deterrence. The prompt for this was the intervention of Pope John Paul II at the UN Special Session on Disarmament in June 1982:

'In current conditions 'deterrence' based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable. ...'<sup>100</sup>

Probably the most famous development from this is the Pastoral Letter of the

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in; CARDINAL O'BRIEN 2006. Nuclear Weapons - Replacing Trident - A Scottish Catholic Response. In: EDINBURGH, A. O. S. A. A. (ed.) *Justice and Peace Pamphlet*. Glasgow: Justice and Peace Scotland. P1

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in; US NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS, T. 1983. The challenge of peace: God's promise and our response. *Origins*. P2

American Catholic Bishops of 1983:

'As Catholic bishops we write this letter as an exercise of our teaching ministry. ... At times we state universally binding moral principles found in the teachings of the Church; ... We do not perceive any situation in which the deliberate initiation of nuclear war, on however restricted a scale, can be morally justified.'<sup>101</sup>

As well as instigating a cottage industry in debate whether or not the Bishops' views were a valid representation of the Catholic Church position,<sup>102</sup> this pastoral letter presaged a number of similar exercises by other Churches. In the UK, the Scottish Churches of both denominations, which would not normally agree on the colour of an orange, were both in vigorous opposition to the Polaris Successor and LRTNF decisions: 'For 30 years the Church of Scotland has consistently condemned the existence and threat of nuclear weapons as sinful and an offence to God's created order.'<sup>103</sup>

'If it is immoral to use these weapons it is also immoral to threaten their use. Some argue that the threat can be justified as the lesser of two evils. The crux of the problem is whether in any foreseeable circumstance a policy of self defence based on the use or even the threat of use of these weapons of terrible destructiveness can ever be morally justified.'<sup>104</sup>

The English Churches took a more measured approach. The Catholic Bishops invited the Cabinet Office to brief their 'In Service Course' on the matter in January 1983: Goodall, the Cabinet Office Official who briefed them, reported; 'On the question of principle, the Bishops were predictably wrestling with the morality of conditional intention: ie could it ever be right to have the intention to commit a morally monstrous act, however justifiable and desirable the objective.'<sup>105</sup> Goodall suggested that the key debate among the Bishops was ethical; the extent to which deterrence was stable and therefore the conditional intent to use nuclear weapons

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<sup>101</sup> The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response - A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops is a 64 page document of detailed and close argument. Like the International Court of Justice ruling on the legality of the use of nuclear weapons, it is often quoted very selectively to make a given point to support opposite sides of the same argument.

ibid.

<sup>102</sup> For instance: KIM, S. S. 1985. The US Catholic Bishops and the Nuclear Crisis. *Journal of Peace Research*, 22, 321-333.

<sup>103</sup> CHURCH OF SCOTLAND 2014. Nuclear Weapons: Society, Religion and Technology Project. In: CHURCH AND SOCIETY COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (ed.). Edinburgh.

<sup>104</sup> Scottish Bishops' Pastoral Letter Apr 1982, quoted: CARDINAL O'BRIEN 2006. Nuclear Weapons - Replacing Trident - A Scottish Catholic Response. In: EDINBURGH, A. O. S. A. A. (ed.) *Justice and Peace Pamphlet*. Glasgow: Justice and Peace Scotland.

<sup>105</sup> CABINET OFFICE Letter Goodall (Cabinet Office) to FCO 'Meeting with the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales: Nuclear Defence Issues' 14 Jan 83. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive: Thatcher MSS (Churchill Archive Centre): THCR 1/4/7 f4.

could be considered to be at a very small risk of realization. He also pointed out; 'They seem to have been impressed by a presentation which they had received the previous day from Dr Paul Rogers of the Bradford University School of Peace Studies, who had apparently argued in favour of Britain conditionally offering to abandon Trident (and Polaris) in return for some matching move from the Soviet Union.'<sup>106</sup> As described above, Michael Quinlan engaged in a personal (but tacitly officially sanctioned) manner with some of the protagonists of this debate,. "In his 1981 pamphlet 'The Morality of Nuclear Weapons', Ruston ... argued that: 'There is no way in which the present possession of nuclear weapons, intended for whatever purpose, can be justified in Catholic morality' ... This was refuted by Quinlan, who argued that surrendering to an atheistic totalitarian regime would be an immoral act.'<sup>107</sup> Quinlan remained active in his private correspondence until his death, effectively acting as a proxy spokesman for the official position in a slightly less overt manner than had Spaight in the 1940s.

Given the febrile atmosphere, the Church of England issued a moderate pamphlet 'The Church and the Bomb' and passed a relatively constrained motion at the General Synod of the February 1983 which recognised;

- '...that it is not the task of the church to determine defence strategy but rather to give a moral lead to the nation;
- (i) Affirms that it is the duty of Her Majesty's Government and her Allies to maintain adequate forces to guard against nuclear blackmail and to deter nuclear and non-nuclear aggressors;
- (ii) ...
- (iii) Judges that even a small-scale first use of nuclear weapons could never be morally justified ...
- (iv) ...
- (v) Bearing in mind that many in Europe live in fear of nuclear catastrophe and that nuclear parity is not essential to deterrence, calls on her Majesty's Government to take immediate steps ... to reduce progressively NATO's dependence on nuclear weapons and to decrease nuclear arsenals throughout the world.'<sup>108</sup>

Government engagement with the Churches on nuclear matters in England remained amicable throughout the eighties, although individual churchmen of

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> OGILVIE-WHITE, T. 2011. *On Nuclear Deterrence: The Correspondence of Sir Michael Quinlan*, London, Routledge. P92

<sup>108</sup> MOD Letter Pym Private Secretary to General Synod of the Church of England (General Synod debate on 'The Church and the Bomb') ["has done much to promote greater public understanding"] dated 24 Feb 83. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive: TNA PREM 19/1960.

personal principle were intimately involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and other protests. The Scottish churches were much less cooperative and have retained a much more radical anti-nuclear stance ever since. One subsequent Church analyst concluded;

‘The English and Welsh bishops naturally want to keep talking to policy-makers. They want to be taken seriously and not dismissed as extremists or unrealistic. But the criteria of Just War teaching are not unrealistic or irrational, and many men and women - not just Catholics - would rejoice to hear Catholic doctrine affirmed as loudly and unambiguously concerning war as it has been in other discourses.’<sup>109</sup>

Ultimately, as the Synod agreed, the role of the Church is not to determine defence policy but rather to give a moral lead to the nation. A contemporary critique of the American Bishops’ Pastoral letter concludes; ‘Yet another level of criticism is that the Bishops really have taken account of the true alternatives to nuclear deterrence. Paul Ramsey said recently, “to judge the morality of deterrence, one must judge as well the morality of the alternatives.”’<sup>110</sup> The Church critiques that were presented to the public tended to be deontological, rather than consequentialist, and therefore tended to contribute to polarization of any subsequent debate and did not contribute to consideration of alternatives to deterrence. They also tended to conflate deterrence and war: ‘Pope John XIII stated that in an age of atomic power ‘it is irrational to think that war is a proper way to obtain justice for violated rights’. The Vatican Council emphasises ‘the unique hazards’ of modern war arising from the weapons now available.’<sup>111</sup> This is not a critique of deterrence, but of war, the avoidance of which is the key function of deterrence. This is another example where a key argument is corrupted by a superficial understanding of the full scope of the factors being considered, an argument that could have been substantially answered by informed official participation.

### **Trident D5 Decision**

During 1981, the MOD progressed negotiations and plans for the procurement and construction of the Polaris Successor system. MISC 7 remained occupied (in secret) with the decision to procure Trident II D5 instead of the C4 system, offering cheaper through-life costs due to sustained commonality with the US Navy throughout the system life. In November, MISC 7 was ready to decide in favour of D5 and Cabinet

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<sup>109</sup> MARKUS, G. 1991. Comment. *New Blackfriars*, 72, 54-55.

<sup>110</sup> VAN VOORST, L. B. 1983. The Churches and Nuclear Deterrence. *Foreign Affairs*, 61, 827-852.

<sup>111</sup> The Storm That Threatens: Statement by the Irish Bishops’ Conference on War and Peace in the Nuclear Age. *The Furrow*, 34, 589-595.

was informed on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1982. Cabinet was invited to decide on D5 on 11<sup>th</sup> March, although in order to enable American Congressional briefings before the announcement on the same day, Cabinet made the decision on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Nott announced the decision to the Commons on 11<sup>th</sup> March. Trident II D5 was far more accurate than the C4, and offered greater range and more warheads per missile. There was therefore potentially a presentation issue – D5 offered far more firepower than the British minimum deterrent required, and it could be perceived as a ‘warfighting’, rather than deterrence, system. This point was made in the Commons reaction; ‘Does the Minister agree that it is not simply a replacement programme but that in terms of quality and quantity of warheads D5 represents almost a quantum leap forward? Will the Minister tell the House why we require a hard kill capability?’ Nott responded;

‘The number of warheads on the missile need not necessarily be more than we now have on Polaris. That is a matter of choice for the British Government of the time. As for the hard kill capability, it is certainly true that D5 is a more accurate missile than C4 and much more accurate than Polaris. It can knock out a specific discreet target in a way that Polaris could not. But that is not why we want it. We have chosen it because of commonality with the United States.’<sup>112</sup>

This distinction added a further focus to the polarizing effect of the Trident debate in public.

The Falklands War diverted much of the media and protest attention away from the nuclear debate, and over the summer, MISC 7 continued to explore means of reducing costs such as cancellation of the expansion of Coulport (part of the submarine base on the Clyde) to process the Trident missiles and negotiation of use of American facilities instead. This would save £500m but at the cost of 2000 jobs in Scotland over the next 15 years. The Cabinet Secretary also noted that this move might be perceived as a loss of independence in the deterrent.<sup>113</sup>

### **Trident, the Media and the Public**

In his routine ‘Media Relations Stocktake’ for Mrs Thatcher in August 1982, her Press Secretary Bernard Ingham did not mention nuclear deterrence as an issue at all; ‘...it is possible to identify the main (inter-related) issues which will preoccupy us over the next 12 months: the Franks report... unemployment, pay, inflation, trades

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<sup>112</sup> HC Debate 11 March 1982 - Trident Missile Programme. HANSARD vol 19 cc975-86. Col 984/985

<sup>113</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister A09119 The United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent; Missile Processing (MISC 7(82)4) dated 27 Jul 82. TNA PREM 19/0695.

union reform ... public expenditure ... crime and punishment ... membership of the EC ...'<sup>114</sup> His subsequent preparations for the September 1982 meeting of the Lord President's Liaison Committee which was developed 'to give guidance to MPs and Ministers on the interpretation of Government policy and to take such action as in their opinion is necessary to sustain public confidence in Government', included presentation on economic issues, law and order, housing and social security policy, with potential for a paper on nationalised industry.<sup>115</sup> Ingham seems to have misread the priorities; in the event, the key agenda item was the identification of a nuclear policy presentation strategy:

'... the need for concerted effort to secure public acceptance of the Government's Trident decision. Opponents were able to range widely in their criticism and to quote in their support sensible people who were concerned with eg; Conventional capabilities or industrial implications. The CND campaign was likely to constitute serious and continuing problem. A great deal of valuable material had already been issued by the Government to explain its decisions in this area and Conservative Research Department should draw on what was already available in the preparation of a consolidated paper on the presentation of defence and nuclear policies ...'<sup>116</sup>

This meeting appears to have set in train a number of changes in the way that the Conservative government dealt with nuclear policy in the public domain. Until this meeting, UK nuclear policy was presented in public only if it had to be, in a grudging, haphazard and often counter-productive manner. At the October meeting, the Conservative Research Department paper on the presentation of the government's nuclear defence policy was the only substantive agenda item. It reported that;

'(b) Opinion polls suggested that a majority of the electorate were broadly in support of the retention of a proper military capability; but only a minority supported Trident even among the Government's own supporters ...

(c) The unilateralist lobby had grown very strong and very influential. It seemed to be making an impressive impact not only among the general public but also in the universities and at local authority level. ... It was essential to counter such campaigns effectively at the local level.

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<sup>114</sup> CONSERVATIVE PARTY Unreferenced memorandum from Ingham (Press Office) to Prime Minister 'Media relations - Stocktaking and Looking Ahead' dated 3 Aug 1982. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive.

<sup>115</sup> CONSERVATIVE PARTY Unreferenced memorandum Ingham (Press Office) to Butler (Cabinet Office) 'Liaison Committee' dated 9 Sept 1982. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive.

<sup>116</sup> CONSERVATIVE PARTY Unreferenced 'Note of Liaison Committee Meeting, Friday 10 Sept 1982'. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive.

(d) In presenting its decision on Trident the Government had naturally set the issue in the context of the threat from the Soviet Union. ... The Government's defence policies needed to be presented in the round and set in a wider context than NATO alone.

(e) The wider work done by the Ministry of Defence to counter the unilateralist lobby was noted, as also the activities of outside associations which had been set up for the purpose, or were prepared to help. But it was not clear that the Ministry of Defence had achieved a sufficient impact. Some of its published material lacked appeal. The Government's message was not getting over to the general public or to opinion formers as strongly as it should. There appeared to be inadequate information officer effort devoted to this task. ...

(f) CND publications were simple, emotive and effective; and they were pushed hard by their supporters at all levels. To redress the balance there was much to be said for harnessing the energy, imagination and enthusiasm of the Party organization ... They could properly undertake the sort of presentational campaign which it would be improper for a Whitehall department to organise. But they lacked financial resources.<sup>117</sup>

This, finally, was a recognition of Nott's lament to the Commons 18 months before; 'The showing of the film 'The War Game' in a village hall in the evening in the presence of young families has a predictable outcome. To argue the choices before us so as to engage the intellect is a much harder task'.<sup>118</sup> The Liaison Committee recognised that this area of presentation stood in need of urgent review, both in substance and method. 'Renewed efforts had to be made to present the message in appealing and effective terms and to get it over strongly to opinion formers... The Ministry of Defence needed to reassess the staff and financial resources allocated to this important job.'<sup>119</sup> The committee recommended a full Cabinet discussion and the Minister of State for Defence was invited to report back to the Secretary of State.

Defence Secretariat 17 was a small, long-standing section within the MOD which was tasked to advise the Secretary of State for Defence on advice on nuclear policy, arms control and disarmament. In February 1983, Heseltine established a parallel 8-man unit, Defence Secretariat 19 (DS19), to advise him on how best to explain to the public the facts about the government's policy on deterrence and multilateral disarmament; its work was to be confined to departmental information

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<sup>117</sup> CONSERVATIVE PARTY Unreferenced 'Note of Liaison Committee Meeting, Wednesday 20 Oct 1982'. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive.

<sup>118</sup> HC Debate 03 March 1981 Nuclear Deterrence. HANSARD vol 1000 cc137-224. Col 137

<sup>119</sup> CONSERVATIVE PARTY Unreferenced 'Note of Liaison Committee Meeting, Wednesday 20 Oct 1982'. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive. paragraph 2



work and specifically ‘...it will be assisting in the preparation of speeches and articles, advising on leaflets and publications and advising on press aspects of the nuclear debate.’<sup>120</sup> In the Lords, the debate focused on whether DS19 was involved in the presentation of government policy, or because the Opposition was publicly opposed to it, it was in fact presenting Party policy: Lord Jenkins inquired;

‘Will the noble Lord accept that sometimes it is rather hard to draw the line between legitimate Government explanation of their policies and party political propaganda? Will the noble Lord agree that it is incumbent upon the Government to make sure that that line is not breached? Will he further agree that some of the films which are being issued under the aegis of this department [DS19] are highly contentious, and that to this side of the House they feel like party political propaganda?’<sup>121</sup>

The noble Lord [Lord Belstead] neither accepted nor agreed.

By April, a more proactive government campaign had significantly shifted the public discourse and Heseltine reported to the Cabinet that; ‘the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) had been successfully thrown on to the defensive by the action taken to identify the left wing affiliations of so many of its leading members.’<sup>122</sup> The Authorised History of MI5 asserts that in the mid 1970s, 8 of the 15 seats on the CND National Executive Council were occupied by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain and ‘In March 1983 the Service provided the MOD with open-source material on the political affiliation of seven leading members of CND.’<sup>123</sup>

Anti-nuclear campaigners maintained a steady pressure; Joan Ruddock (CND Chair) recalled;

‘1983 was general election year and attacks on CND escalated dramatically. We repeatedly asked to debate with ministers but to no avail.’<sup>124</sup>

In 1985, an MI5 case officer approached Channel Four’s flagship investigative programme 20/20 Vision, alleging that, in violation of their own rules, MI5 had been conducting surveillance on CND leadership and senior leaders of the Miners’ unions.<sup>125</sup> The programme was due to be aired in February 1985 but was cancelled

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<sup>120</sup> HL Debate 24 March 1983 Defence Secretariat 17 and 19. HANSARD vol 440 cc1226-30. Col 1228

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Col 1229

<sup>122</sup> CABINET OFFICE CC(83)14th Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing St Thursday 28 April 1983. TNA CAB 128/76/14.

<sup>123</sup> ANDREW, C. 2009. *Defence of the Realm: The authorised history of MI5*. Kindle ed. London: Penguin. P676

<sup>124</sup> RUDDOCK, J. 2016. *Going Nowhere: A Memoir*. Kindle ed.: Biteback Publishing Location 1020

<sup>125</sup> GUARDIAN. CND, Miners ‘under MI5 monitoring’. 21 February 1985, p.1. and DORRIL, S. 1993. *The Silent Conspiracy*, London, Heinemann. P25

on the advice of the Independent Broadcasting Authority on the basis that it 'had been advised by counsel that it would be committing a criminal act under the Official Secrets Act if the programme were shown and as it was a statutory body responsible to Parliament, it should not deliberately break the law.'<sup>126</sup> The programme was shown to MPs, and the Home Affairs select committee demanded an inquiry into the activities of 'Special Branch' and MI5. Amongst other claims, the MI5 'mole' asserted that MI5 had passed to DS19; 'non-classified information about the left-wing affiliations of senior members of CND, which, it is claimed, Mr Heseltine used in political speeches about the peace movement.'<sup>127</sup>

This is consistent with the Authorised History of MI5 which records surveillance of the Greenham Common Peace camp and various members of CND leadership (including Kent and Ruddock) between 1982 and 1985. Andrew also records - which of course would have been unknown to 20/20 Vision and CND - that;

'KGB directives passed by Oleg Gordievsky<sup>128</sup> to SIS after he arrived at the London residency in the summer of 1982 demonstrated that Moscow regarded the anti-nuclear movement in Britain (as in the rest of the West) as 'our natural allies' and believed it could exercise considerable influence over it.'<sup>129</sup>

Andrew also describes how Gordievsky's allegations were moderated by senior MI5 officials in briefings to the Prime Minister '...because of fears that the Prime Minister would take too literally exaggerated KGB claims of its ability to influence the movement.'<sup>130</sup> Although there was some concern expressed by the Bridges Inquiry about increasing politicization of the Security Services,<sup>131</sup> this does tend to suggest the opposite, with MI5 appearing to play down elements of intelligence evidence because of potential political interpretation: always an issue when political interests are exposed to raw intelligence rather than analysis.<sup>132</sup>

Ruddock noted: 'It was spine-chilling stuff. Of course we always suspected, but to see it in print was just sickening. An MI5 whistleblower, Cathy Massiter, ... detailed MI5 phone taps, agent infiltration and the use of MI5 material for party political purposes.'<sup>133</sup>

<sup>126</sup> GUARDIAN. CND, Miners 'under MI5 monitoring'. 21 February 1985, p.1.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Gordievsky was a KGB officer in London and acted as a double agent for the British Secret Intelligence Service from 1974 to 1985

<sup>129</sup> ANDREW, C. 2009. Defence of the Realm: The authorised history of MI5. Kindle ed. London: Penguin. Location 15000

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. Location 15005

<sup>131</sup> GUARDIAN. Time for a Little Self-Scrutiny. 10 May 1985.

<sup>132</sup> The role of the infamous 'Dodgy Dossier' in the decision for the 2003 Gulf Conflict is a case in point.

<sup>133</sup> RUDDOCK, J. 2016. Going Nowhere: A Memoir. Kindle ed.: Biteback Publishing p1226

‘CND argues that opposition also has to be outside the normal democratic channels ... the argument is that the immorality of mass destruction is such as to justify reference to a higher order morality — i.e. one is not only entitled, but indeed compelled to break the law if that law is itself fundamentally unfair or immoral.’<sup>134</sup>

In a liberal democracy, it is a responsible use of the Security Services, with appropriate oversight and accountability, to exercise surveillance of those breaking the law to perpetrate such activities, however morally motivated. Massiter’s key allegations were that this accountability was lacking, not that the activity *per se* was wrong. A subsequent government inquiry found no such failure;

‘The Prime Minister was personally ‘very concerned’ by Massiter’s appearance on television and asked Sir John Jones for an ‘absolute assurance that there had been no unauthorised interception of subversives.’ The DG replied that there had been none since 1972 when it was within his knowledge.’<sup>135</sup>

Lord Bridges was tasked with an inquiry, the output of which was labelled a ‘complete whitewash’ by CND.<sup>136</sup>

One (near-contemporary) commentator observed that:

‘The halving of popular support for unilateralism between September 1981 and the end of the 1983 election campaign suggests that CND’s message is a rather weak appeal which flourishes in a relative issue-vacuum but which quickly wilts before the better-organised and more institutionally grounded appeals of political parties during election campaigns.’<sup>137</sup>

The Labour Party, which suffered a crushing defeat in 1983, had adopted a unilateralist stance during this election, its manifesto being described as the longest political suicide note in history.<sup>138</sup> Even Bruce Kent, the General Secretary of CND, was quoted saying ‘We were badly let down by the spokespeople of the Labour Party’.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> BYRNE, P. 1998. Nuclear Weapons and CND. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 51, 424-434. P428

<sup>135</sup> Quoted in ANDREW, C. 2009. Defence of the Realm: The authorised history of MI5. Kindle ed. London: Penguin. Location 12458

<sup>136</sup> RUDDOCK, J. 2016. Going Nowhere: A Memoir. Kindle ed.: Biteback Publishing Location 1237

<sup>137</sup> ROOTES, C. 1989. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: from Moral Crusade to Mobilisation of Anxiety? In: MARSH, C. & FRASER, C. (eds.) *Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press. p99

<sup>138</sup> KAUFMANN, G. 1983. *1983: Thatcher Triumphs again* [Online]. London: BBC. Available: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/vote\\_2005/basics/4393313.stm#issues](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/vote_2005/basics/4393313.stm#issues) [Accessed 25 Oct 2015].

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in CURTICE, J. 1989. The 1983 Election and the Nuclear Debate. In: MARSH, C. & FRASER, C. (eds.) *Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press. p151

## **Historical evidence – conclusions**

These three chapters have considered the historical evidence for government engagement in public discourse on nuclear deterrence policy. The complex relations between public perception and presentation, nuclear policy, nuclear strategy, technical factors such as cost and performance and realpolitik played out in the most real of circumstances, for the very highest stakes. The relations between these issues have second and third order implications which could be significant but which are seldom addressed when formulating public policy. They do tend to shape that engagement though.

Capability of nuclear weapons is a relative measure; an atomic bomb is hideously powerful, but ineffective in comparison to a hydrogen bomb, although arguably an atomic bomb is just as capable a deterrent. But when combined with missile technology, and then anti-ballistic missile technology, the arms race associated with maintaining the credibility of the nuclear deterrent during the Cold War meant significant resources were devoted to research and development at the very cutting edge of science and technology. This drove significant costs into the maintenance of a credible deterrent.

Technical factors were always a consideration in themselves, but they also influenced strategy and policy decisions. Assuming cost is a technical factor driven by technological demands, the need to achieve credible (capable relative to the threat environment) systems to provide assured deterrence drove the decisions to purchase Skybolt, Polaris and Trident. The need to purchase American systems was driven by the inability of the UK to sustain the research and development base because of the crippling cost. The Chevaline project was the epitome of this, and the last example of a British sovereign nuclear weapon system development project.

Military factors also played a part as technical imperatives. Successive governments had treated NATO and the sovereign nuclear capabilities as distinct, although Alliance commitments were used by Wilson to support the case for Polaris in 1964. This mindset hindered the Thatcher government response to the simultaneous protests over NATO intermediate range nuclear forces and the replacement of Polaris.

All governments handled nuclear deterrence policy decisions in very constrained groups, with membership restricted to only the most senior ministers or officials; this was due in part to an inherited obsessive secrecy, and in part to a feeling that only

senior ministers could be trusted to consider and present the sensitive national security arguments in their ethical context; scruples, as Churchill put it.

Some of these scruples have significantly influenced the nature of government engagement in public discourse on nuclear deterrence. They appear to have their roots in the First World War, and to have been honed in the desire to appear to retain the moral high ground during the Second World War, to the extent that the real bombing policy was not revealed to the public. A similar aversion to admitting the threat to non-combatants has inhibited discussion of the nuclear deterrent since. Given the influence of this ethical reticence on the development of public engagement, the next chapter will consider specifically the relationship between government nuclear policy and contemporary ethics of war. This will provide the detailed analysis of ethical theory to underwrite the conclusions at Chapter 8.

In the early 1980s, the Conservative government was concerned for how its message about nuclear deterrence was getting across to the public in the very febrile environment fuelled by the standoff between the USSR and NATO over intermediate range nuclear forces in Europe and the simultaneous decision to replace Polaris with Trident and the resurgence of CND. Aggressive government campaigning targeting both the inherent arguments of nuclear deterrence in the Cold War, and the political sympathies of the leaders of the anti-nuclear opposition was successful in averting a major shift in public opinion away from the government position advocating an independent nuclear deterrent. Despite some false starts, in particular the spectacular own goal over Civil Defence, the Conservative government started its second term in office with a clear mandate to procure Trident and to deploy the NATO ground-launched cruise missiles.<sup>140</sup>

The successful Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987 was more due to the success of this Alliance-wide realpolitik measure than the campaigning of the European anti-nuclear demonstrators. Ironically, the resilience and tenacity that the British, German and Dutch governments had to show in facing down their domestic opposition to the deployments must have indicated to Moscow the resolve within the Alliance to achieve either parity or removal. The timidity the governments of those nations show today in addressing nuclear deterrence matters in public may well have the opposite effect.

In short, a government that struggles to articulate its nuclear deterrence policy to its

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<sup>140</sup> The NATO deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles had, in 1979, been agreed as a tactic to force the USSR to the negotiating table to withdraw the entire class of intermediate range nuclear weapons from Europe.

own populace is unlikely to appear overly credible to a potential adversary. The Thatcher government learned this, over three bruising years –chapter 8 below will consider whether those lessons have been retained.

## Chapter Seven: Ethical Considerations and Wicked Issues

Chapter 4 concluded that Churchill's government had gone out of its way to claim the moral high ground at the beginning of the Second World War and had then masked the true nature of the strategic bombing campaign in order to present it to the public in what they felt was a more acceptable light. This aversion to a strategy that deliberately involved non-combatant casualties can be seen to have had its roots in the First World War, but it is equally clear that the lexicon to accommodate these concepts was developing in parallel with, if not actually in reaction to, the realities of 20<sup>th</sup> Century warfare. Chapters 5 and 6 suggested that subsequent British governments avoided the ethical issues associated with nuclear weapons simply by not engaging with them in public. It is also clear from private records and conversations however, that individual leaders felt the weight of the burdens they carried.

Given that the issue of the ethics associated with nuclear strategy seems to have been critical for engagement on nuclear policy, this chapter will consider in more detail the current arguments relating to the ethics of war. It will not provide an in-depth analysis of the history of thinking on the morality of nuclear weapons, but it will attempt to put current thinking into the context of a constantly evolving paradigm; or perhaps more accurately, it will compare government thinking in one paradigm, with the contemporary rights-based ethical paradigm. It will conclude with two brief case studies of alternative models of government engagement with the public on complex ethical issues.

### The Just War tradition – the traditional approach

*'There may be dark days ahead, and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield, but we can only do the right as we see the right, and reverently commit our cause to God.'*<sup>1</sup>

This statement was made by King George VI in his radio broadcast to the Empire on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939; the day Britain declared war on Nazi Germany. The main political purpose of this speech was to claim the 'moral high ground' and give the British Peoples the reassurance that they were doing the 'right' thing. King George addressed the issues in terms of the commonly held tenets of the Just War tradition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> KING GEORGE VI. 1939. *The Kings Speech to His Peoples* [Online]. London: BBC. Available: <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-Kings-Speech/> [Accessed 13 Apr 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Attempting to defining the commonly held tenets of the Just War tradition here is perilous; James Turner Johnson has spent an eminent academic career considering the tradition in all its respects

He reassured listeners that there was a just cause for the war; the whole broadcast was designed to make the British Peoples feel that, however much they may abhor the need for a further World War, the country had been ‘... forced into a conflict, for which we are called, with our allies to meet the challenge of a principle which, if it were to prevail, would be fatal to any civilised order in the world...’ and that ‘...the freedom of our own country and of the whole British Commonwealth of nations would be in danger.’ He emphasised that war was the last resort; ‘Over and over again, we have tried to find a peaceful way out of the differences between ourselves and those who are now our enemies, but it has been in vain’. He was clear that it was being ordered with the right intent; ‘For the sake of all we ourselves hold dear, and of the world order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge.’ War was obviously being declared by a competent authority; he was the King – but he couched the whole speech in terms of the collective ‘we’, implicitly including his democratically elected government in the authority (and also of course the responsibility). In 1939, there was little doubt in government that Britain was ill-prepared for war, but it would hardly have been appropriate for this speech to contain a detailed analysis of the chance of success, or the proportionality of the ends. His concluding paragraph did give a flavour of the struggle his government was anticipating; ‘The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead, and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield...’<sup>3</sup> The whole speech offers an implicit commentary on the priorities of the government at the time that the Second World War was clearly, and from the start, considered from the Allies’ perspective as a Just War.

### **The Ethics of Command of a Trident Submarine – a Personal Note**

If the reader will forgive the use of the first person briefly; I am not an ethicist, but I have given a great deal of thought to the morality of the use of force and, in particular, the concept of nuclear deterrence. I have served in Polaris and Trident SSBNs on and off since 1986, including command of two Vanguard Class submarines between 2003 and 2007. I therefore have had ample opportunity, and motivation, to reconcile the full potential of my personal responsibilities with some

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and this remarkable canon is reflected in the bibliography and considered briefly at chapter 3. In his detailed analyses, Johnson does not, however, provide a concise précis of the key tenets! The discussion here will therefore assume the tenets to be those generally derived from Grotius and described by Bellamy (which reflects those assumed by Johnson and others). BELLAMY, A. 2006. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq*, London, Blackwell. pp122-131

<sup>3</sup> KING GEORGE VI. 1939. *The Kings Speech to His Peoples* [Online]. London: BBC. Available: <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-Kings-Speech/> [Accessed 13 Apr 2013].



kind of moral compass. In the absence of formal guidance,<sup>4</sup> I sought to legitimise the use, or threat of use, of nuclear weapons to myself through consideration of the available contemporary Just War literature. The rather binary options available seemed initially to be that either all those involved in the business of deterrence were acting immorally, or there was a shortfall in the literature. I do not accept that all of the very honourable professionals with whom I served are merely immoral, or too stupid to notice or too hypocritical to care. Nor are they amoral in the Machiavellian realist sense; neither I, nor they, accept that there are no appropriate moral rules that should be governing this highly emotive and very difficult area of moral thinking.

My own view defaults to the 'Dirty Hands argument' compellingly described by Walzer in 1973,<sup>5</sup> the essence of which is that a person can be faced with a situation where they have two options, both of which appear morally reprehensible, but one of which must be carried out. This argument, for me, pivots on the difference between deontological ethics and utilitarian morality. In essence – according to this thinking - the end can sometimes excuse the means, but the actor must appreciate that the ends excuse his actions, they do not justify them: his actions mean that he is no longer innocent. That is not to say he is guilty:

'Why shouldn't he have feelings like those of St. Augustine's melancholy soldier, who understood both that his war was just and that killing, even in a just war, is a terrible thing to do? (Other writers argued that Christians must never kill, even in a just war; and there was also an intermediate position which suggests the origins of the idea of dirty hands. Thus Basil The Great (Bishop of Caesarea in the fourth century A.D.): 'Killing in war was differentiated by our fathers from murder ... nevertheless, perhaps it would be well that those whose hands are unclean abstain from communion for three years.' Here dirty hands are a kind of impurity or unworthiness, which is not the same as guilt, though closely related to it.)'<sup>6</sup>

Of course there is a further complication; deterrence is the threat of the use of force in order to prevent an adversary taking a course of action which would lead to the need to use force. Kenny argued: 'This is still immoral since everyone involved still

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<sup>4</sup> Arguably, frustration at the inability of the MOD to provide official guidance to the Commanding Officer of an SSBN ultimately led me to this thesis. I was always content with the ethical aspects of my responsibilities, but I could never be sure that I could articulate them in terms of which the MOD would approve. If the MOD cannot justify the deterrent to its own SSBN Commanding Officers, what does that say for its ability to make a coherent argument in public? See: CORBETT, A. S. 2006. War is always a matter of doing evil so that good may come of it. *Naval Review*, 2006 vol 1, 13-17.

<sup>5</sup> WALZER, M. 1973. Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2, 160-180.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p169

must have the conditional willingness to launch such an attack.’<sup>7</sup> He continues; If someone involved says he would pull the trigger if deterrence fails, ‘... then I can only tell him, quite soberly, that he is a man with murder in his heart.’<sup>8</sup> I do not agree; on one level, this is a man prepared to kill in war, but actually this is a man who, by being prepared to kill, prevents war. In my view, nuclear deterrence has prevented war between the major powers for 70 years: the slight metaphysical evil of threatening violence is far outweighed by the good of preservation of the peace. This is a decision process every Commanding Officer must go through in their preparations; this Commanding Officer would have pulled the trigger.

This thinking led, a few years later, to a ‘frank and open exchange of views’ with a historian who asserted that military officers simply did not understand or worry about the ethics of their profession. This culminated in the following exchange: ‘After 25 years of naval service, I do not recognise any of the stereotypes you have portrayed of military understanding of the ethics of war’. His response was; ‘Well, I have described my ethically derived theoretical model; I can’t argue with your experiential model.’<sup>9</sup> It seems, perhaps, that many of those involved in the application of force in modern Britain have a set of ethical parameters derived from an ‘experiential model’ that is not congruent with modern theoretically derived ethical models.

The ‘experiential model’ moral paradigm within which I and my contemporaries (and, I suspect, many senior officers, officials and politicians) are able to justify nuclear deterrence to ourselves does not appear to be one that is in common usage in contemporary ethical theories and it is unlikely to find approval amongst a jury of ethicists. In his seminal *Just and Unjust Wars* (1974) Walzer considered that even *in extremis*:

‘These rights [the rights possessed by individual human beings regardless of circumstance; Walzer defines them as ‘war rights’] I shall argue, cannot be eroded or undercut; nothing diminishes them; they are still standing at the very moment they are overridden: that is why they have to be overridden. Hence breaking the rules is always a hard matter, and the soldier or statesman who does so must be prepared to accept the moral consequences and the burden of guilt that his action entails.’<sup>10</sup>

In the dirty hands context, Walzer wrote; ‘

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<sup>7</sup> KENNY, A. 1985. *The Logic of Deterrence; a Philosopher Looks at the Arguments For and Against Nuclear Disarmament*, London, Waterstone & Co. Firethorne Press. p53

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p56

<sup>9</sup> Author seminar discussion with Cambridge University Lecturer Oct 2009

<sup>10</sup> WALZER, M. 1977a. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations* New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. P231

‘When rules are overridden, we do not talk or act as if they had been set aside, canceled, or annulled. They still stand and have this much effect at least: that we know we have done something wrong even if what we have done was also the best thing to do on the whole in the circumstances.’<sup>11</sup>

The premise of British nuclear deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is that nuclear force would only be used in the general context of Churchill’s supreme emergency;

‘In an emergency, neutral rights can be overridden, and when we override them we make no claim that they have been diminished, weakened, or lost. They have to be overridden, as I have already said, precisely because they are still there, in full force, obstacles to some great (necessary) triumph for mankind.’<sup>12</sup>

Rodin interprets this concisely; ‘According to Walzer (and John Rawls ...), a community is permitted to violate the most basic in bello norms if doing so will enable it to avoid destruction at the hands of a military aggressor.’<sup>13</sup> As will be shown below, Rodin does not condone this view. Bellamy describes it as; ‘when a state confronts an opponent who threatens annihilation, it can be morally legitimate to violate one of the cardinal rules of the war convention – the principle of non-combatant immunity.’<sup>14</sup> Just like the dirty hands argument, the concept of supreme emergency recognises that it does not justify, merely excuses;

‘It is the acknowledgment of rights that ... forces us to realize that the destruction of the innocent, whatever its purposes, is a kind of blasphemy against our deepest moral commitments. (This is true even in a supreme emergency, when we cannot do anything else.)’<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, accepting that those responsible for Britain’s armed forces and nuclear deterrent are neither immoral, amoral, or simply hypocrites, they work to an ethical approach that considers different factors when formulating a moral framework than those in common currency amongst philosophers. Such a framework would seem to need to be Realist in its derivation and, from a post-enlightenment perspective, it might appear ruthless and therefore very easy to pillory in terms of theories of

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<sup>11</sup> WALZER, M. 1973. Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2, 160-180. p171

<sup>12</sup> WALZER, M. 1977b. Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations. New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. p247

<sup>13</sup> RODIN, D. 2008. The Moral Inequality of Soldiers: Why Jus in bello Asymmetry is Half Right. In: RODIN, D. & SHUE, H. (eds.) *Just and unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers*. Oxford University Press. p54

<sup>14</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2008. The Ethics of Terror Bombing: Beyond Supreme Emergency. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 7, 41-65. (abstract and less succinctly, p42)

<sup>15</sup> WALZER, M. 1977b. Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations. New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. p262

rights-based and contemporary versions of the Just War tradition. The dirty hands and supreme emergency arguments described above, best fit my 'experiential model', and reflect a commitment to the deterrence ethic while recognising the repugnance inherent in it.

### **Supreme Emergency, Dirty Hands, and Nuclear Deterrence**

As described in Chapter 4 above, in 1944-45, the British government did not feel able to describe accurately the mission of the RAF Bomber Command to the public, preferring instead to dissemble. Bellamy concludes that;

'British military and political leaders did not justify themselves by reference to either the moral tragedy they confronted or the need for special permissions. Significantly, they chose not to do either of these things because they calculated that a significant portion of the British public would oppose the deliberate bombing of German non-combatants and believed that this could undermine domestic support for the war. In turn, this suggests that proponents of the idea of supreme emergency overestimate the extent to which liberal societies are prepared to accept the deliberate killing of non-combatants by their governments, and underestimate the normative force of non-combatant immunity.'<sup>16</sup>

Chapters 4,5 and 6 suggest that similar reticence has been prevalent throughout British consideration of acts of war that may cause significant non-combatant casualties, and in particular the public handling of nuclear deterrence policy. At the start of the Second World War, King George VI was clearly setting a high ethical standard for the British entry into, and conduct of the war. A democratic state requires the support of the population in order to commit to something like a total war – and King George's address made clear that he was under no illusions about how 'total' the forthcoming conflict was going to be. In terms of nuclear deterrence, a similar – if not greater - level of commitment would be necessary from the population if the UK were to face an existential nuclear threat, and the government of the day would be faced with the task of preparing the public, materially and conceptually. The public of 1939 understood what war meant – many could remember the First World War and most families could number family members who had been lost in that conflict. The modern public has almost no experience or understanding of war; other than as something professional armed forces deploy to

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<sup>16</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2008. The Ethics of Terror Bombing: Beyond Supreme Emergency. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 7, 41-65. p58

elsewhere. Preparing a British 21<sup>st</sup> Century public for a war which would have significant domestic ramifications would be extremely demanding.

Haslam mooted that; 'The suggestion that the writings of academics on international relations are irrelevant to the needs of statesmen should come as no surprise ....'<sup>17</sup>

It is the object of this chapter to investigate if this is the case; if so, why that might be, and; what moral factors statesmen, and those involved in the nuclear deterrence mission do consider. In particular, recourse to the 'supreme emergency argument' will be tested in the context of contemporary ethical arguments although, as demonstrated in the historical analyses above, there is little historical evidence of a direct link between contemporary ethical thought and decisions on UK nuclear deterrence policy.

### **The Just War Tradition**

Almost without exception, contemporary western commentaries on the ethical aspects of warfare allude to the Just War tradition. The use of the term tradition is a careful one; Just War thinking is too loose a concept to merit description as either a school of thought, a theory or a paradigm. But there is clearly a thread of ethical thinking related to the conduct of violent relations between political entities that seems to merit some form of definition. Bellamy describes it as '...a protracted normative conversation about war that has crystallised around a number of principles, labelled the 'war convention' by Walzer.'<sup>18</sup> Within this tradition, or conversation, many, if not most, current writers on the ethics of war incorporate references to historical figures who have contributed to the evolution of the tradition, perhaps to demonstrate a degree of philosophical antecedence or authority. But unlike Johnson, few situate their antecedents in their historical contexts.

This chapter is framed within the perpetually evolving contemporary role of the Just War tradition. It is not intended to provide a history or analysis of the derivation of the tradition. However, the relative importance of each of the parameters commonly considered to inform the Just War tradition has varied according to their contextual relevance, and this transient salience is an important factor when considering the contemporary debates within the analysis of the ethics of the use of force and will therefore be considered when relevant. Johnson specifically analyses and contributes to, the evolution of thinking on the ethics of war;

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<sup>17</sup> HASLAM, J. 2002. *No virtue like necessity. Realist thought in International Relations since Machiavelli*, New Haven and Oxford, Yale University Press. P1

<sup>18</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2006. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq*, London, Blackwell.p5

'Both just war and pacifist thought in Western culture have developed as historical traditions shaped by diverse influences ... Exactly how these traditions have developed historically is fundamentally important for understanding them and drawing out their meaning in the contemporary context.'<sup>19</sup>

He is not optimistic about the effect;

'...Using history deepens both our base of knowledge and our ability to formulate and analyse normative claims. But it has to be used conscientiously, lest it lead to the kind of extremist positions that employ versions of history to support ideological commitments.'<sup>20</sup>

Most commonly, St Augustine figures as the originator of Christian thought on the morality of warfare. Rodin considers the tradition a '... combination of international law and contemporary philosophical apology backed by a legal, theological and philosophical tradition stretching to St Augustine and beyond...'<sup>21</sup> McMahan considers Augustine '...the earliest writer of significance in the just war tradition'<sup>22</sup> and Bellamy is more qualified in his view; 'Augustine undoubtedly made an important contribution to the tradition, but it is important to recognise that he did not put forward a single and coherent theory.'<sup>23</sup> Butterfield would have disagreed. He argued that Augustine actually put forward the most elegant and inclusive moral law; '... St Augustine could formulate the whole aspect of the resulting situation in the injunction; 'Love God and do what you like.'<sup>24</sup> Butterfield's paraphrasing suggests that Augustine put forward a moral theory that covered every circumstance; one ultimate law which regulates the conduct of life and applies to all circumstances. This;

'...stands as the final measure of the action, then that law must be much more flexible than our ordinary formulas and regulations, ... At the same time, if it is to provide us with a genuine standard for the judgement of human conduct ... it is essential to assert its definiteness, its importunity and the clarity of its insistences. ... For the Christian this is not only the first of laws but it is a unique one - it stands through time as the source of all others that might be prescribed. And it is absolute.'<sup>25</sup>

Butterfield was writing, as a devout Christian himself, of a Christian. His argument would appear to struggle for a secular grounding. But the idea behind his

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<sup>19</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 2011. *Ethics and Use of Force; Just War in Historical Perspective*, London, Ashgate.p7

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. P11

<sup>21</sup> RODIN, D. 2002. *War and Self-Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P104

<sup>22</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P84

<sup>23</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2006. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq*, London, Blackwell. P29

<sup>24</sup> BUTTERFIELD, H. 1951. *History and Human Relations*, London, Collins. P43

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. P41

apparently simple one-line interpretation; 'love God and do what you like' is anything but simple, and can be applied equally to either secular or spiritual morality. Augustine assumed that the person facing the moral choice would love God. Clearly, such a person would aspire to heaven in due course, and would understand that he would be held to account for all of his actions, and his intentions when doing those actions. Therefore, he would weigh very carefully all of the pertinent factors, and act in a manner of which he concluded God, not other men, would approve;

'For their Master had taught them not to seek to be good for the sake of human glory, saying, 'Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them, or otherwise ye shall not have a reward from your Father Who is in heaven. [Matthew 6.1]''<sup>26</sup>

Augustine himself anticipated the obvious criticism of this injunction, that it allowed men complete freedom with no earthly recourse or judgement;

'... nor must they allow themselves to believe that God overlooked their character when He permitted acts which no one with impunity commits. For some most flagrant and wicked desires are allowed free play at present by the secret judgment of God, and are reserved to the public and final judgment.'<sup>27</sup>

A moral man should act in accordance with his own conscience, not in accordance with the approbation (or otherwise) of other men.

As time has moved on, thinking about the just use of violence has grown ever more complex and prescriptive, and the third party approbation or condemnation that Augustine specifically prohibited has become ever more prevalent. Butterfield, with his gloriously succinct turn of phrase and sense of humour, put it thus; 'But it would appear that those whom Christ has made free hardly dare believe in their liberty.'<sup>28</sup> Certainly Augustine did offer views on a number of aspects of the conduct of war, and most contemporary analyses contain increasingly arcane discussions over the relative importance of 'competent authority', 'right intent' and what has become known as 'discrimination'.

### **The Moral Subject and Invincible Ignorance**

Bellamy suggests that; 'The just war tradition fulfils two roles. It provides a common language that actors can use to legitimise recourse to force and the conduct of war and that others can use to evaluate those claims. It can also inhibit actions that

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<sup>26</sup> AUGUSTINE 413/1952. *City of God*, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica. Book V Ch 14 p220

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Book 1 Ch 28 p146

<sup>28</sup> BUTTERFIELD, H. 1951. *History and Human Relations*, London, Collins. P43

cannot be legitimated.<sup>29</sup> The suggestion of a 'common language' will be further examined below. Fifty years ago, Quade argued that '... the principles of just war become operative only after the classic political question is answered: who should do the judging?'<sup>30</sup> Clearly, for Augustine this was simple; the actor was the judge and should act morally, and he would face a Divine accounting eventually. This fundamental question is yet to be answered definitively for the secular actor, and it remains just as important. The nature of the judge of the morality of an action changes the nature and purpose of the codification of the moral thinking; is 'Just War' thinking simply a tool for policy makers, or an analytical framework for subsequent philosophical debate, or should it be both? This is not an esoteric distinction; it feeds a number of subordinate, but significant ethical issues. If the person who should judge the morality of an action is the actor themselves, how do they ensure they have sufficient information about the moral ramifications of the action in order to make that judgement? Can they? Can a subordinate assume that his cause is just because his superiors have assured him that it is so? Can both sides in a conflict rightly believe that they have a just cause? Finally, if the appropriate judge is someone other than the moral actor, how can they apply an authoritative set of ethical criteria?

Who should do the judging? Clearly, the primary purpose of any ethical system such as the Just War tradition is to inform the decisions of statesmen and members of the armed forces on the use of force; both before it is used (*jus ad bellum*) and during conflict (*jus in bello*). But to return to Augustine's Divine judgement; who judges whether the decisions were 'right', in a moral sense?

Policy must be made in real time, with limited information and probably with some assumptions. The real World is riddled with misperception and accident, with deliberate deception and with bureaucratic and military ineptitude; and it is in this environment that statesmen must make decisions that have strategic implications; they cannot afford to wait for moral endorsement of their decisions after the fact. Plato's 'Rings of Gyges' fable suggests a man would rather act immorally but appear moral publicly, than act morally but appear immoral.<sup>31</sup> Walzer suggests that;

'There are, first of all, serious difficulties of perception and information (in war and politics generally), and so controversies arise over 'the facts of the case.' There are sharp disparities in the weight we attach

<sup>29</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2006. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq*, London, Blackwell. P5

<sup>30</sup> Quade QL, Civil Disobedience and the State, *Worldview* 10 no11 (Nov 67) p4-9 Quoted in CHILDRESS, J. F. 1978b. Just War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities and Functions of their Criteria. *Theological Studies*, 39, 427-445.

<sup>31</sup> PLATO 1952. *The Republic*, Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica. Verses 359-363



even to values we share, as there are in the actions we are ready to condone when these values are threatened.'<sup>32</sup>

Walzer's 'Just and Unjust Wars' is a far more compelling argument than some more abstract recent philosophical contributions to the Just War canon because it has this realistic grounding in the harsh realities of modern international relations. Writing in 1978, while the Cold War was at its chilliest, Childress wondered;

'What degree of certitude should policy makers and citizens have about the justice/justification of a particular war? Should they be convinced that the preponderance of the evidence indicates that the war is just/ justified according to the above criteria? Or should they be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt?'<sup>33</sup>

Childress doesn't actually answer this question. King George VI was clear that he believed that 'we can only do the right as we see the right' and Browne, writing in 1945, seemed to agree; 'An action is moral, we shall say, when the agent judges that the act is right and the action would not have occurred if the agent had not so judged. Thus there must be a desire or intention to do what is right as such.'<sup>34</sup>

Both Childress and Browne seem to imply that the agent of the moral action is the appropriate authority to determine its just nature. Clearly, this was the view held by King George VI. Whilst common, this is not a universal view; Walzer argues that; '...the moral reality of war is not fixed by the actual activities of soldiers but by the opinions of mankind. That means, in part, that it is fixed by the activity of philosophers, lawyers, publicists of all sorts. ...'<sup>35</sup> Walzer obviously reserves judgement to subsequent analysis. This suggests that he considers that the Just War tradition could be an appropriate guide for the actor, but instead of Augustine's Divine accounting, Walzer's actor would be appropriately held to account by philosophers, lawyers and publicists. Walzer continues;

'In moral life, ignorance isn't all that common; dishonesty is far more so. Even those soldiers and statesmen who don't feel the agony of a problematic decision generally know that they should feel it. Harry Truman's flat statement that he never lost a night's sleep over his decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima is not the sort of thing political leaders often say. They usually find it preferable to stress the painfulness of decision-making; it is one of the burdens of

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<sup>32</sup> WALZER, M. 1977a. Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. P12

<sup>33</sup> CHILDRESS, J. F. 1978b. Just War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities and Functions of their Criteria. *Theological Studies*, 39, 427-445. P444

<sup>34</sup> BROWNE, S. S. S. 1945. Right Acts and Moral Actions. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 42, 505-515. PP509-510

<sup>35</sup> WALZER, M. 1977a. Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. P15

office, and it is best if the burdens appear to be borne. I suspect that many officeholders even experience pain simply because they are expected to. If they don't, they lie about it.<sup>36</sup>

This cannot be substantiated and appears to weaken the case Walzer is trying to make. If statesmen do lie subsequently because they believe they are expected to have felt pain when they felt none, they undermine the validity and certainty of their own real-time moral judgements in order to pander to the self-appointed jurists who are sitting in judgement upon them. Actually, Truman did not say that he did not agonise over the decision, he merely indicated that he was sure that it was the right one.

Michael Quinlan and Charles Guthrie, experienced and senior figures in Britain's defence establishment during the end of the Cold War and subsequently have argued;

'...[decisions to go to war] entail taking very serious decisions on the basis of estimates of complex futures with wide margins of uncertainty and as a result much scope – often on both sides of a conflict – for different perceptions and judgements about where justice and prudence point.'<sup>37</sup>

In a dwindling minority amongst theorists, Johnson argues vigorously that; 'the decision whether to resort to use of armed force is properly the responsibility and right of those in positions of supreme political authority in a society, not that of moralists...'<sup>38</sup> Neither are moralists, or publicists, omniscient;

'The difficulty of knowing what is right has been made more apparent by the recent shift away from absolutist types of ethical theory toward teleological, or consequential, types. For if the rightness of an act depends on its leading to consequences of a certain sort, knowledge of its rightness requires knowledge of its consequences, and this requires experience. The relevant consequences may in fact be so numerous and far-flung that anticipation of more than a small fraction of them is beyond the power of the wisest man.'<sup>39</sup>

This difficulty in prediction of consequences is echoed by Fisher;

'A more serious criticism is that the kind of god-like calculation required to draw up such a balance sheet before the onset of war is beyond the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. P19

<sup>37</sup> GUTHRIE, C. & QUINLAN, M. 2007. *Just War. The Just War tradition; ethics in modern warfare*, London, Bloomsbury. P23

<sup>38</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 2009. Thinking Historically about Just War. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 8, 246-259. P251

<sup>39</sup> BROWNE, S. S. S. 1945. Right Acts and Moral Actions. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 42, 505-515. P513

wit of man, given the uncertainty and unpredictability of war and the incommensurability of the values to be thus balanced. What probabilities are to be assigned to the possible outcomes?’<sup>40</sup>

Obviously, these criticisms are valid only from a consequentialist perspective. If one views the same actions from a deontological stance, distance and time from the action should make no difference. Is morality in the eye of the actor, or of the subsequent jury, and should the actor’s actions be determined by consideration of how they will be perceived by posterity, or by his own assessment of the appropriate moral decision?

### **Just War in Practice?**

Former British Prime Minister Mr Blair used a striking turn of phrase in his retirement speech; ‘But I ask you to accept one thing. Hand on heart, I did what I thought was right.’<sup>41</sup> It would be easy to deride this as empty rhetoric at the end of a premiership still shrouded in intense ethical debate about the Iraq War of 2003. Alternatively, if taken at face value, it is a very Augustinian exit. Blair’s government chose to go to war in Iraq in direct opposition to some of the most extensive public opposition ever seen in the United Kingdom. None of the commentators on that decision know what all of the salient factors were. Blair clearly felt he acted appropriately; many do not, but even if all the facts (as they were understood in the autumn of 2002) were commonly known, and they are not, there would still be vitriolic disagreements about the legitimacy of the Iraq War; ‘Yet the substance of justice has never been so universally recognised that, in practice, all men could agree upon the justness of a particular war - at least before it was fought.’<sup>42</sup> Typically, however, Blair’s next line is altogether more nuanced: ‘I may have been wrong. That’s your call. But believe one thing if nothing else. I did what I thought was right for our country.’ Here the emphasis has shifted from a deontological ‘I did what I thought was right’ to a very secular and consequentialist; ‘what I thought was right for our country.’<sup>43</sup> And the listener has become the judge.

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<sup>40</sup> FISHER, D. 1985. *Morality and the Bomb; an ethical assessment of Nuclear Deterrence*, Beckenham, Croom Helm. P25

<sup>41</sup> BLAIR, T. 2007. *Blair’s speech: full text | Politics | guardian.co.uk* [Online]. London: Guardian Newspapers. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/may/10/labourleadership.labour2> [Accessed 15 Jan 2013].

<sup>42</sup> MILLER, L. H. 1964. The Contemporary Significance of the Doctrine of Just War. *World Politics*, 16, 254-285. P278

<sup>43</sup> BLAIR, T. 2007. *Blair’s speech: full text | Politics | guardian.co.uk* [Online]. London: Guardian Newspapers. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/may/10/labourleadership.labour2> [Accessed 15 Jan 2013].

But it is not clear what Blair was inviting the listener to judge; his actions and whether he thought they were the right thing to do, or the outcomes? Browne differentiated between 'moral' and 'good':

'If the distinction is clearly grasped and the word 'moral' used to refer to a character which certain acts have because of their motivation, it will be recognised that an action may be moral even though the act performed is wrong, and an action may be immoral even though the act performed is right.'<sup>44</sup>

He was thus able to argue coherently that a moral actor may act with right intent, even if he could not foresee all of the consequences of his actions. The issue with subsequent analysts being the 'judges' of the morality of previous actions is that they will have a different set of information, and experience of the consequences, on which to base their opinions of the morality of the actions or decisions; and they have only the testimony of the moral actors as to their intent in the first instance.

'The clearest evidence for the stability of our values over time is the unchanging character of the lies soldiers and statesmen tell. They lie in order to justify themselves, and so they describe for us the lineaments of justice. Wherever we find hypocrisy, we also find moral knowledge.'<sup>45</sup>

Here is the more ominous purpose of the 'moral jurist'; the sceptic. Augustine's Divine accounting discouraged immoral activity disguised as righteousness because there would be no way for a Christian to conceal wrong intent from God. But, just as Walzer assumed a degree of hypocrisy in soldiers and statesmen that may not be warranted, he also assumed a degree of competence in his jurists that is not necessarily justified. He suggests that philosophers, lawyers and publicists 'fix' the moral reality of war, but as McMahan puts it; 'Even the acknowledged experts - the theorists of the just war - disagree among themselves about the justice of virtually every war.'<sup>46</sup> This does rather support Haslam's assertion above; begging the question what value the 'acknowledged experts' are to those trying to formulate policy in real time? Perhaps the real value of the Just War tradition is that it has provided a common lexicon for the analysts and policy-makers. The next section will consider various contemporary debates within the Just War canon to examine this perpetual lack of coherence within the tradition.

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<sup>44</sup> BROWNE, S. S. S. 1945. Right Acts and Moral Actions. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 42, 505-515. P506

<sup>45</sup> WALZER, M. 1977a. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations* New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. P19

<sup>46</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P120

## Rights-Based Ethics of the Use of Force

To start with another King's speech on the eve of conflict, Shakespeare has an anonymous King Henry V discussing the justness of his cause with two of his common soldiers on the eve of the battle of Agincourt:

Bates: '... For we know enough if we are the King's subjects. If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us.'

Williams: 'But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, 'We died at such a place' ... Now if those men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it – who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection.'<sup>47</sup>

The core issues here are; can a common soldier know if the cause for which he fights is just and is it possible for the cause to be just on both sides? And who is to judge? Traditionally, following Vittoria,<sup>48</sup> the view is that soldiers cannot be expected to judge unless an action is manifestly wrong. Revisionists challenge this moral equality. McMahan extrapolates these questions to provide the core arguments in his book 'Killing in War';

'Some have argued, however, that it is possible for both sides in a war to be justified in fighting. This could be true if justification is subjective in nature. One side could be fighting an objectively just war ... while the other could be fully epistemically justified in believing that its war was just when it was actually objectively unjust. Both would be justified in fighting on a subjective account of justification.'<sup>49</sup>

McMahan goes on to consider the position of the combatants in a war which is not objectively just. 'The wrong that is involved in fighting in an unjust war is very serious; it is the wrong of intentionally killing people who are doing nothing more than defending themselves and other innocent people from threats of wrongful harm.'<sup>50</sup> Rodin supports this position: 'Certainly the critique of the 'moral equality of combatants' seems generally sound; most combatants on the unjust side pose rights-violating threats to their adversaries.'<sup>51</sup> This position is one side of one of the contemporary debates within the Just War tradition: it derives from the issue that

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<sup>47</sup> SHAKESPEARE, W. 1984. *Henry V*, London, Encyclopedia Britannica. Act IV Scene 1 p553

<sup>48</sup> MILLER, L. H. 1964. The Contemporary Significance of the Doctrine of Just War. *World Politics*, 16, 254-285. P256

<sup>49</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P143

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. P132

<sup>51</sup> RODIN, D. 2011. Justifying Harm. *Ethics*, 122, 74-110. P109

both sides in a war cannot be just – one must be objectively wrong, even if they think their cause is just.

Basing his consideration of the legitimate use of force on the right of the innocent not to be attacked, McMahan constructs a sophisticated logic about the moral risks associated with participating in an unjust conflict. He concludes that all combatants have a duty to assure themselves of the justice of their cause (and by implication not obey orders to fight until they have done so). So Bates and Williams would not be exonerated of the wrongness of their cause merely because they were the King's subjects. McMahan does acknowledge the difficulty of this; 'Even if soldiers were less willing to defer to the authority of their government, it would still be difficult for them to deliberate competently about whether a war in which they have been commanded to fight is just or unjust.'<sup>52</sup> So if soldiers struggle to deliberate competently, who should?

### **Just war and the rights-based framework**

Competent authority is another of the tenets of the Just War canon, exercising varying salience depending on the nature of the international order at the time. Much of the foregoing discussion about the moral actor assumes that the actor in question is the competent authority considering *jus ad bellum*; the decision to go to war. In a modern liberal democratic state, that authority is vested in the elected government. Some legalists might argue it has been abrogated to the UNSC, but regardless of legal theory, in the custom and practice of the last 70 years, this has not been the case. For Shakespeare's Bates and Williams above, the competent authority was King Henry V. Clearly, King George VI and his government comprised the competent authority for the UK in 1939. And, agree or not with his decisions, Mr Blair's government comprised the competent authority for the UK in 2003; a democracy is governed by the elected executive, not by demonstrations of public ire. As Jurist Edmund Burke wrote;

'... his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. ... Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion. ... a flatterer you do not wish for.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P120

<sup>53</sup> BURKE, E. 1774. *Speech to the Electors of Bristol* [Online]. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Available: <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s7.html> [Accessed 22 Jul 2011].

Burke wrote in his (unsuccessful) 1774 address to the electors of Bristol that the candidate was not there to reflect public opinion but to exercise his judgement on behalf of the public. This is still the case; it is a necessary condition of the democratic function that the integrity of those elected to government is assumed. This is why there is such a furore when they are caught failing to maintain this standard of behaviour, as the 2009/11 MPs' expense accounts scandals indicate. This phenomenon is even more pronounced in the armed forces. The 2012/13 scandals in the US army over relationships between married officers and ladies who were not their wives ended the career of the most senior and arguably highly regarded US serviceman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Had this case involved politicians, it might not have wreaked the same career devastation; had it involved actors, nobody would have batted an eyelid. The members of the armed forces, and the public at large, expect a higher degree of moral probity of their senior officers than of any other profession, except perhaps Churchmen.

The moral values and social structures of 'western' armed forces do not reflect the highly individualistic liberal democracies they serve. McMahan is disparaging about this; 'In most military organisations, the ability of soldiers to engage in autonomous reflection and deliberation about the content of their orders is also deliberately and systematically sabotaged.'<sup>54</sup> Certainly, disciplined service requires different personal priorities to a university campus; Nancy Sherman considers military training rather differently; 'For those who believe manners build morals, the military offers the lesson in spades ... inscribed on the faces and bodies of the midshipmen is a commitment not just to character but also to an aesthetic of character.'<sup>55</sup> To a very great extent, military training *is* indoctrination, specifically designed to foster this aesthetic.

'More fundamentally, boot camp attempts to change the core values of a self, so that one is prepared to sacrifice in a way uncommon in civilian life, and prepared to overcome the fear and aversion to killing that is bred in the bone as a civilian.'<sup>56</sup>

Servicemen trust politicians no more than do other members of the population. But they do trust other servicemen, implicitly. If a senior officer tells his subordinates that this or that conflict is necessary and just, the servicemen have every right to assume that this is the case and that their cause is just. To a great extent, this is

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<sup>54</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P119

<sup>55</sup> SHERMAN, N. 2005. *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy behind the Military Mind*, New York, Oxford University Press. P43

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p75

the obverse of Burke's point above. It is the duty of the candidate to exercise his judgement to the best of his abilities, and it is the legitimate expectation of the voter that he will. Similarly, it is the duty of the senior officer, with his access to highly sensitive intelligence information and strategic overview to assure himself that each military action is just, and it is a valid assumption, on which the whole discipline of the armed forces is based, of his subordinates to accept that he has done so; Shakespeare's Bates and Williams are both correct. McMahan however, disagrees:

'It should be apparent to them [soldiers] that unless they give very careful consideration to what they are being ordered to do, whether they end up as just combatants or unjust combatants is mainly a matter of moral luck. If they fail to take these and other considerations into account, they are negligent.'<sup>57</sup>

'When a soldier is uncertain about the morality of a war, the presumption should be that the morally safer course is not to fight.'<sup>58</sup> McMahan's suggestion undermines the discipline and deep vertical and horizontal loyalties that underpin the military profession. Whilst this may be a valid theoretical position, McMahan subsequently describes the practical difficulty, without moderating his position:

'...although there is a law of *jus ad bellum*, there is no authoritative interpreter of that law that soldiers can consult in advance of going to war. When the legal authorities in a soldier's society order him to fight in a war, international law fails to provide him with any source of guidance that might authoritatively controvert his government's assertions about the legality of the war.'<sup>59</sup>

In 2005, he had suggested that;

'There is, it might be argued, one way in which right intention could be satisfied even in the absence of a just cause; if people falsely believed that there was a just cause and fought with the intention of achieving it. Yet it seems to me that this would clearly *not* be the *right* intention in the circumstances, though it might well be a *good* intention.'<sup>60</sup>

McMahan has been consistent in his argument that the moral equivalence of combatants is based on the difficulty of achieving his criteria for just cause. Sixty years earlier, Browne suggested that;

'Moral goodness is an attribute which characterizes certain actions (performances of acts) by reason of the motives from which they

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<sup>57</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P185

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. P145

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. P192

<sup>60</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2005. Just Cause for War. *Ethics & International Affairs (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 19, 1-21. P5



spring, while rightness characterizes certain acts (the thing done) independently of the motives from which they are performed. Each is independent of the other'.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, according to Browne's criteria, a combatant who is involved in a conflict which he believes is just, and is fighting with 'right intent', is acting morally, even if the cause is not actually just. This is derived from the 'traditional' 17<sup>th</sup> Century Just War tradition interpretation (following Suarez) that soldiers should follow their leaders; 'trust your prince'. This appears to be the basis of the case against which McMahan is arguing. In 2008, Rodin suggests that; '...a person is generally held to be accountable for his or her actions according to the facts as he or she reasonably and honestly apprehended them to be at the time.'<sup>62</sup> Although this is specifically looking at *jus in bello*, as a normative principle presumably it would also apply to *jus ad bellum* decisions. Rodin continues; 'War leaders are held responsible for the decisions they make in light of the facts as they honestly and reasonably believed them to be.'<sup>63</sup> It is not clear whether Rodin considers that instructions from superior military authorities constitute legitimate elements among those facts. An assumption that they do underpins military service.

McMahan goes on to develop the implications of a lack of just cause into an apparently coherent *jus ante-bellum*. He argues elsewhere that '...just cause is necessary for the satisfaction of any of the other conditions of a just war...'<sup>64</sup> although he did qualify that by suggesting that Just War in this context meant more than merely a morally justified war. But his usage of just cause requires subsequent experience; it is impossible to establish just cause until all the consequences can be identified and considered. In that case, the actual 'operational' utility of Just War thinking; the ability to use it to assist in decision-making as opposed to subsequent critique, is minimised. And as McMahan acknowledges, there is seldom consensus amongst the subsequent jurists. In effect, McMahan's definition and extrapolation of just cause preclude the moral use of force.

That said, when considering *jus in bello*, there is *in extremis* a normative limit to the control of actions within conflict. 'I was simply following orders' is not a defence in

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<sup>61</sup> BROWNE, S. S. S. 1945. Right Acts and Moral Actions. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 42, 505-515.

<sup>62</sup> RODIN, D. 2008. The Moral Inequality of Soldiers: Why *Jus in bello* Asymmetry is Half Right. In: RODIN, D. & SHUE, H. (eds.) *Just and unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers*. Oxford University Press. p67

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p68

<sup>64</sup> MCMAHAN, J. 2005. Just Cause for War. *Ethics & International Affairs (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 19, 1-21. P1

cases of manifest war crimes. So to the extent that there are gross injustices which can never be condoned, McMahan's view is valid. This debate will never be satisfied, but the important aspect is the debate itself; only in engaging in it will the soldiers and politicians be kept 'honest'.

### **The Right of Self Defence**

Probably the least obviously contentious 'just cause' is the right of self-defence, and it is here that revisionist challenges seem to be challenging the common lexicon of the Just War tradition most vividly. The Just War language of self-defence for states is embedded in the international system, not least as the most obvious manifestation of the concept of state sovereignty, and it is clearly articulated in the UN Charter, article 51:

'Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.'<sup>65</sup>

Johnson describes defence as;

'... justification for the use of force by private persons, did not reason from self-defense to the justification of the use of force on behalf of the political community, but instead rendered the idea of just cause for resort to force in terms of the sovereign's responsibility to maintain justice, vindicating those who had suffered from injustice and punishing evildoers.'<sup>66</sup>

He tempers this with further consideration of contemporary examples, including the pastoral letter of the American Catholic Bishops, which sought to set out the Church's position on nuclear deterrence in 1983; 'For the US Catholic bishops in 1983, the focal aim was to prevent resort to armed force by the United States, and to allow it only if justified by the cause of defence.'<sup>67</sup> Johnson goes on to consider the implications of the tendency for Western nations to protect individuals in other states from either the state itself, or from significant threats within those states. He cites the 'responsibility to protect' as a significant factor for Western states when deciding to intervene (or not) in Somalia, Rwanda and former Yugoslav states and he concludes from those examples that states cannot claim a right of self defence in the same way that an individual can – the right of states to defend themselves is

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<sup>65</sup> UN 1945. Charter of the United Nations. San Francisco: UN.

<sup>66</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 2011. *Ethics and Use of Force; Just War in Historical Perspective*, London, Ashgate.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p137

more to do with their ability to act as a force for the health of the political community.

<sup>68</sup> By analyzing current events, Johnson considers the evolution of the Just War lexicon.

In his 2002 book, Rodin re-examines the application of Just War theories of self-defence to states, seeking to '...build an account of defensive rights as emerging from a complex set of normative relations between two moral subjects.'<sup>69</sup> He develops a complex model of normative relationships based on a development of Hohfeldian rights theory and concludes that; 'A right of defence exists when a subject is at liberty to defend a certain good by performing an action which would otherwise be impermissible.'<sup>70</sup> He acknowledges that there may be other factors that could be considered but argues that;

'... rights have a distinctive stringency, such that they generally override competing moral considerations. Secondly, they have a particular role in standing against, and placing limits upon, what may be called 'goal based' moralities such as consequentialism. Thirdly, rights are moral considerations which have a unique relation to individual moral subjects.'<sup>71</sup>

Rodin considers that there are two potential justifications for a state having a right of 'national defence' ; the reductive strategy; 'an organised exercise of the right of self-defence by large numbers of individuals at one time'<sup>72</sup> and the more commonly considered domestic analogy; a state can be treated as an individual existing in an anarchic state of nature. 'Rodin suggests that, at most, a right of national-defence can only be individually justified by its ends ... it is a right that belongs to the state exercised against other states, but only for the benefit and protection of individual citizens.'<sup>73</sup> But, Woodard suggests, Rodin then discounts this strategy because; '... [it] is pretty hopeless. Much of the trouble stems from the limitations of proportionality, necessity and imminence to which, he argues, the individual right of self defence is subject.'<sup>74</sup> And, specifically, it fails to address the circumstances of a humanitarian intervention against a state which is abusing its own population, so does not present a normative justification.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p153 et seq

<sup>69</sup> RODIN, D. 2002. *War and Self-Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P26

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. P99

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. P24

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. P127

<sup>73</sup> CHIFOR, G. 2003. War and Self-Defence by David Rodin. *The Modern Law Review*, 66, 483-488. P486

<sup>74</sup> WOODARD, C. 2005. War and Self-Defence by David Rodin. *Mind*, 114, 453-457. P454

Similarly, Rodin discounts the domestic analogy arguing that the nature of sovereignty has changed since the inception of the UN and therefore the notion of state sovereignty cannot give legal substance to the right of national-defence and therefore even less is it capable of justifying it morally;

‘The basic problem is that sovereignty is a factual and not a normative concept. ... The concept of sovereignty is, by itself, incapable of conferring normative content on the right of national-defence because the sense of sovereignty here employed itself requires normative justification. Morally speaking, it is an empty vessel. For these reasons, the normative aspirations of the right of national defence in international law require a grounding in moral theory.’<sup>75</sup>

Rodin then considers the right of defence of political communities in terms of defending the ‘common life of the community.’

‘... This interpretation attributes to the common life a moral value prior to, and independent of, the value of the individuals who compose it. We may call this the ‘strong organic view’ of the common life. ... Given such a view, it is extremely simple to account for the obligation to die on behalf of, and the right to kill in defence of, the common life, for the latter is seen as an entity whose value exceeds, and is prior to, the value of any individual life ... The strong organic view derives what credibility it has from observations about the essential role of the community in defining and shaping the very nature of the individual. ... People are what they are within communities, and in abstraction from them would be unrecognisable as moral beings.’<sup>76</sup>

The quote above is extensive, but exemplifies the heart of one side of the argument. The basis of Rodin’s examination of the right of national defence is the perspective of individual rights. The ethicist describes the ‘strong organic view’ in order to reject it: a realist (Morgenthau) suggests that; ‘The history of political thought is the history of the moral evaluation of political power.’<sup>77</sup> As an explanation of real human behaviour, the strong organic view offers a much far coherent view of political history than Rodin.

### **The Strong Organic View**

Rodin asserts that ‘It seems to me that it would also be disproportionate to use lethal force against someone who sought to deprive you of important political

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<sup>75</sup> RODIN, D. 2002. *War and Self-Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P119

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. P143

<sup>77</sup> MORGENTHAU, H. J. 1945. The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil. *Ethics*, 56, 1-18. P1

freedoms such as the right to vote or freely express your opinions.<sup>78</sup> This concept would be alien to almost everyone who has fought for political freedoms since the enlightenment – from the Tolpuddle martyrs to Tiananmen Square and the Maidan; if the political history of the post-enlightenment world suggests anything, it shows a sustained and often violent struggle over hundreds of years to attain exactly those freedoms that Rodin writes off.

Sharma (paraphrasing Johnson) counters Rodin's presumption against war by insisting that it is actually a 'presumption against injustice', which stands at the forefront of Just War thought.<sup>79</sup> Although he does not use Rodin's terminology, Johnson suggests that the strong organic view; the idea that something other than 'rights' merit the use of force, actually underpins the whole Just War tradition;

'In sum I have been arguing that just war tradition provides us with three fundamental moral reminders: first that sometimes the use of force may be necessary to protect or preserve values that would otherwise be damaged or lost; second that both the resort to force and the application of forceful means must be subjected to a searching intentionality of justification and restraint...'<sup>80</sup>

Johnson draws on historical context to inform his understanding of the writings of Just War tradition, 'I think it essential to take account of historical experience and traditions encapsulating that experience in politics and ethics.'<sup>81</sup> This is a fundamentally different approach to Rodin and McMahan.

Rodin and McMahan both conclude that there is no moral justification for the use of force in a state based international environment. For different reasons, they conclude that the only legitimate use of force would be some form of world police power in the restitution or prevention of aggression.<sup>82</sup> It is this type of ethical discussion to which Clement VIII, Pope from 1592-1605, was referring when he wrote; 'Actually, in matters of business and affairs of state there is never any need to avail oneself of the work of academics [dottori] since with their excessive subtleties they are more likely to ruin them than bring them to a good conclusion.'<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> RODIN, D. 2002. *War and Self-Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P48

<sup>79</sup> SHARMA, S. K. 2009. The Legacy of Jus Contra Bellum: Echoes of Pacifism in Contemporary Just War Thought. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 8, 217-230. P224

<sup>80</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 1984. *Can Modern War be Just?*, New Haven USA, Yale University Press. P29

<sup>81</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 2009. Thinking Historically about Just War. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 8, 246-259. P249

<sup>82</sup> RODIN, D. 2002. *War and Self-Defense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P199 and MCMAHAN, J. 2009. *Killing in War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. P190

<sup>83</sup> Pope Clement VIII, 26 August 1595 {La Legazione di Roma di Paolo Paruta (1592-1595) ed G De Leva (Venice 1887) Vol 1 p268 Quoted in HASLAM, J. 2002. *No virtue like necessity. Realist thought in International Relations since Machiavelli*, New Haven and Oxford, Yale University Press. P1

In an anarchic world comprised of states, what use is a morality that insists everything is illegitimate to a statesman or soldier?

### Alternatives to Rights-Based Ethics

Whetham suggests that the Just War criteria are merely a particular codification of the criteria which comprise most moral decisions.<sup>84</sup> If Just War thinking could be reduced to a single sentence, accepting the gross oversimplification for discussion purposes, it might read something like this: A competent authority can, in a just cause, with a right intent, as a last resort and with a reasonable chance of success, do something harmful if the harm anticipated is not disproportionate to the good to be obtained. According to Coleman this could be true of any moral decision; take a surgeon contemplating an operation on a patient.<sup>85</sup> Clearly the surgeon is competent to conduct the operation but he will always seek informed consent from either the patient or a responsible person (usually the next of kin). Between them, they would constitute a competent authority. The operation will clearly bring some benefit (just cause) to the patient but there may be risks associated and the competent authority must understand these risks in relation to the benefit (proportionality) and surgery should be conducted only when all less risky options have been exhausted (last resort). The surgeon must be conducting the operation for the benefit of the patient, not merely because he gets paid for it (right intent) and there must be a reasonable chance of success.

Childress addresses this concept with particular reference to the Just War tradition;

‘Actually we formulate and use criteria that are analogous to those that determine whether a war is just and justified whenever we face conflicting obligations or duties, whenever it is impossible to fulfil all the claims upon us, to respect all the rights involved, or to avoid doing evil to everyone. Sometimes we confront two or more *prima-facie* duties or obligations, one of which we cannot fill without sacrificing the other(s).’<sup>86</sup>

This, of course, describes the nuclear deterrence ‘dirty hands’ argument considered above; the *prima facie* duty to protect the society and population of the state is in conflict with the *prima facie* duty not to inflict non-combatant casualties. Childress uses the concept of *prima-facie* obligations or duties to differentiate between moral

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<sup>84</sup> WETHAM, D. 2016. “Are We Fighting Yet?” Can Traditional Just War Concepts Cope with Contemporary Conflict and the Changing Character of War? *The Monist*, 99, 55-69.

<sup>85</sup> COLEMAN, S. Reconsidering the Supreme Emergency Argument. “When is it right to do wrong?”. Euro ISME Conference, 2012 JSCSC Shrivenham. ISME.

<sup>86</sup> CHILDRESS, J. F. 1978b. Just War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities and Functions of their Criteria. *Theological Studies*, 39, 427-445. P429

factors that have an absolute nature to them; 'If an obligation is viewed as absolute, it cannot be overridden under any circumstances; it has priority over all other obligations with which it might come into conflict.'<sup>87</sup> The reason that 'Just War' has such a long tradition is, of course, that there is a *prima-facie* obligation not to use violence against others, and the Just War tradition has evolved precisely in order to identify rationally occasions when this *prima-facie* obligation must be abrogated in the face of other *prima-facie* obligations. It is merely one of a number of complex moral calculi that statesmen are forced to use when assessing their policy options.

This ethical discussion now takes on a suspiciously realist tone. Bellamy quotes Niebuhr; 'Niebuhr ... rejected traditional just war criteria, insisting that no moral values were absolute and that all could be sacrificed in order to protect other values. ... Much better, thought Niebuhr, to deny absolute values and evaluate each case on its merits.'<sup>88</sup> In his investigation of the evolution of the Just War tradition, Bellamy considered the impact of Realist thought; 'Machiavelli placed no universal moral or legal constraints on the prince's decision to wage war or its conduct. The only guide was necessity. For Machiavelli, this meant that morally evil means were permissible if they accomplished good consequences.'<sup>89</sup>

Machiavelli was not interested in 'good' or 'bad', merely 'effective'. This was not a moral consideration but a purely political one – action was measured purely by effect, and good and bad action was assessed purely against its utility in the maintenance of the State. It was this pervasive amorality; clearly applicable to the actions of the Church and states alike, which drew such opprobrium from his contemporaries, many of whom were key thinkers in the development of the Roman Catholic Just War canon.<sup>90</sup> The realist canon of thinking is nearly as vast as the Just War canon, but more single-minded; '[Pope] Clement [VIII] asserted that ... sovereign princes might, because of reasons of state, make and break treaties and alliances, lie, betray, and follow other such practices.'<sup>91</sup> Niebuhr suggested that no area of politics was ever immune from moral claims but, on the other hand, no moral action could escape the pull of parochial self-interest.<sup>92</sup> Bellamy concludes that the Just War tradition incorporates sub-traditions dominated by natural law, positive law and realism.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. P430

<sup>88</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2006. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq*, London, Blackwell. P106

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. P57

<sup>90</sup> CORBETT, A. S. 2010. *National Security and the National Interest*. MPhil, Cambridge. Pp19-26

<sup>91</sup> Lettres du Cardinal d'Ossat A. de La Houssaye, ed Amsterdam 1708 quoted in CHURCH, W. F. 1972. *Richelieu and reasons of state*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. P55

<sup>92</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2006. *Just Wars: from Cicero to Iraq*, London, Blackwell. P106

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.p229

In the hands of philosophers such as Augustine and others, the Just War tradition evolved as an ethical tool that allowed recourse to violence under certain circumstances, but then inhibited action taken under that recourse. As it has moved further from its roots, and since the end of the Cold War especially, it appears to be developing into a prohibition on the use of force, with increasingly arcane and narrowly defined exceptions. Some contemporary treatments reduce Just War ethics into a normative fundamentalist theory which precludes the use of force by states in any circumstance, including self-defence, with a prescription that involves World government and morally legitimate police actions in the place of national defence. It is difficult to see why statesmen would consider Walzer's jury of philosophers, lawyers and publicists relevant if their actions were to be analysed according to these criteria, especially when there is no consensus amongst the 'jurists' in any case. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Walzer's jury could, alternatively, be construed as consisting of contemporary statesmen at the United Nations and, as Bellamy suggests; 'Under the 1945 [UN] system, sovereigns are legally required to present their case for war to a group of peers.'<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, after 70 years of custom and practice, during which it has customarily failed to exert this authority, the UN system has little credibility in this regard.

### **Implications**

There appears to be a fundamental aspect of common human morality which is insufficiently represented in the post-Enlightenment canon of Just War thinking which is, however, present in the thinking of those with responsibility for waging war. Modern moral philosophy is a factor for contemporary statesmen, officials and military personnel, but it seems to be only a factor, and those more intimately involved in ethics naturally feel that they would prefer to see it take a more central, if not pre-eminent role. There is a teleological tendency amongst modern moral philosophers to argue for a single normative rule, such as Kant's categorical imperative, but they appear to be trying to simplify them too far and thus end up with a catalogue of prescriptions that apply in many cases, but not necessarily in all. The logic to get to them is so set around ludicrously hypothetical examples that the simplicity that Kant brought to the equation is lost. Kant's categorical imperative, 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law' however, is in itself, anything but simple and harks back to the Augustinian directive to 'love God and do as you will'. It is an

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<sup>94</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2009. When is it Right to Fight? International Law and Jus ad Bellum. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 8, 231-245. P241



exhortation to take every decision seriously, weigh every factor as it applies to the best of your knowledge at the time and to act in accordance with your conscience. In short, it is an ethical echo of Niebuhr's realist insistence that no moral values are absolute and that all could be sacrificed in order to protect other values.

This conclusion does not align with Rodin and McMahan, and others of similar ilk. The reason for that is that they regard the rights of individual human beings as entailing more than *prima-facie* duties and obligations, and they do not attribute any inherent moral value to political communities, and states in particular. Thus the rights to life of individuals cannot be abrogated under any circumstances, including defence of a community. The efforts of Rodin and McMahan to identify a catechism to encapsulate this, however, fail to achieve the sophistication of either Kant or Augustine, and as a result their serious contributions to the understanding of the factors that statesmen should be taking into account are condemned to the sidelines; a functional pacifism, as Johnson put it.<sup>95</sup>

In the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this naivety has a pernicious and dangerous side-effect; it threatens to hijack the lexicon of Just War thinking. If the right of national self-defence is rendered meaningless in the moral vocabulary offered by modern ethics, then the language being used inhibits the thought processes available to those involved. The reduction of the richly complex vocabulary of the ethics of international relations to that of pacifism introduces intolerable inhibitions on the moral use of force, and the discourse, or conversation as Bellamy put it, is diminished. Legitimate regimes would struggle to justify the use of force in almost every circumstance, including Rodin's 'national defence', and, ironically, the way would then be easier for only immoral regimes to use force without opposition.

It appears that the most important thing about moral discourse is not that it has a single normative solution, but that the discourse exists. Statesmen must feel that they must be able to justify their actions, and ethicists must be able to challenge them; and the lexicon of the Just War tradition provides the language and paradigm for that exchange; it is diminished at our peril.<sup>96</sup> The Just War tradition does not

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<sup>95</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. Ibid. Thinking Historically about Just War. 246-259. P255

<sup>96</sup> I have not done this concept justice but would recommend the Appendix describing 'newspeak' in George Orwell's '1984' as an example of the use of language to circumscribe independent thought: 'The purpose of newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten ... a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc, should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words.' ORWELL, G. 1949. *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Harmondsworth, Penguin. Appendix p257-268

constitute a normative basis on which international relations is conducted, but it does provide the words we use to talk about it.

### **Why don't statesmen act morally?**

'The clearest evidence for the stability of our values over time is the unchanging character of the lies soldiers and statesmen tell. They lie in order to justify themselves, and so they describe for us the lineaments of justice. Wherever we find hypocrisy, we also find moral knowledge'<sup>97</sup>

As considered briefly above, one limitation with moral discourse is that it inhibits its own parameters by its lexicon. Modern Western philosophy is almost exclusively derived through the lens of the Enlightenment and the focus on the rights of the individual; Rodin and McMahan regard the World as a collection of autonomous individuals, each with absolute rights and they formulate philosophical arguments accordingly. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt suggests that '...philosophers since Kant and Mill have mostly generated moral systems that are individualistic, rule-based, and universalist. That's the morality you need to govern a society of autonomous individuals.'<sup>98</sup> He goes on to suggest that there are factors that legitimately inform moral decisions other than those which informed Kant and Mill, and subsequently most post-enlightenment thinking.

Who judges therefore is important, because it changes the nature of the thinking behind Just War ethics. Policy must be made in real time, with limited information and some assumptions; does the statesman act in accordance with his own conscience, or in accordance with what he believes will meet the approval of subsequent analysts? And does this then have an effect on his actions? Should it? This difference pervades every strategic decision. The 'jury' is also important in this context because if the jury has an agenda, and the Just War tradition has always been susceptible to selective use,<sup>99</sup> it can be used to devastating effect to make what might have been reasonable and well-considered decisions in the circumstances appear utterly immoral in hindsight if the 'jury' considers different factors to the statesman.

One contemporary 'jury' for the British government could be seen as the British public. This chapter started with a review of the King's Speech of September 1939, considering the ethical tenets it invoked to persuade and encourage the British

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<sup>97</sup> WALZER, M. 1977a. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations* New York: Basic Books Classics Kindle. P19

<sup>98</sup> HAIDT, J. 2012. *The Righteous Mind*. Kindle ed. London: Allen Lane. Locations 1671-1673

<sup>99</sup> JOHNSON, J. T. 2011. *Ethics and Use of Force; Just War in Historical Perspective*, London, Ashgate. P11

public as they faced the second major war in their lifetimes. Despite the moralising, rhetorical flourishes and public pronouncements, the British strategy for area bombing was exactly that which the government denied; terror bombing. There are ethical arguments that can be made to excuse this, but as Bellamy concluded, there was clearly unease within the British government about how those arguments would stand up in public, even during wartime.<sup>100</sup> In the event, the public acquiesced in a convenient fiction – that non-combatant casualties were the unintended consequences of attacks on military targets.

Chapters 4-6 suggest that successive governments have simply avoided public discussion of this nature on nuclear weapons policy, not so much because the policy itself is morally reprehensible, but because it is difficult to present in terms which unambiguously appear 'good' to the public. Plato's Rings of Gyges morality still applies, and there is no evidence that the public is prepared for a more sophisticated argument, nor that the government could make it. The next section will consider two alternative models for government engagement on complex ethical issues.

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<sup>100</sup> BELLAMY, A. 2008. The Ethics of Terror Bombing: Beyond Supreme Emergency. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 7, 41-65. P60

## Wicked issues

It is the lot of government to face 'wicked' issues. Originally a term coined in the social policy environment in the USA, a wicked issue refers;

'... to that class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing. The adjective 'wicked' is supposed to describe the mischievous and even evil quality of these problems, where proposed 'solutions' often turn out to be worse than the symptoms.'<sup>101</sup>

Use of this term has expanded beyond the social policy environment and, in effect, this thesis considers how one of those wicked issues has been addressed by successive British governments; the issue of nuclear deterrence policy.

There has always been a tension in the relationship between 'science' and 'ethics'. The increasing power of science to affect the world in which we live poses distinct ethical questions which often fit precisely into this definition of wicked issues. The balance between the threats and benefits of scientific innovation in issues as widely spread as; energy production and climate change, use of animal subjects in research on human diseases, the teaching of evolution in religious schools, nuclear deterrence and; genetic analysis or modification, pose some of the key ethical issues facing modern society. One commentator suggests;

'What has happened is that the speed of technological change has outstripped our ability to adjust our social life and ideas. It is clear that technology is forcing us to confront some of our most dearly treasured ideas because it has devised means of doing things that we would never countenance if it were proposed that they were undertaken without the benefit of technological assistance, as most them can be.'<sup>102</sup>

Or, more bluntly; 'We have created a Star Wars civilization, with Stone Age emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology.'<sup>103</sup> The core of these issues tends to be at the heart of modern ethical debate; are there perpetual, deontological moral values which should preclude certain activities, even if those activities promise huge consequential benefits? 'Scientific advances often create 'policy vacuums' or situations that demand choices. But the right path is seldom

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<sup>101</sup> CHURCHMAN, C. W. 1967. Free for All. *Management Science*, 14, B-141-B-146.

<sup>102</sup> RIVIERE, P. 1985. Unscrambling Parenthood: The Warnock Report. *Anthropology Today*, 1, 5.P6

<sup>103</sup> WILSON, E. O. 2012. The Social Conquest of Earth. Kindle ed. London: WW Norton Kindle. Locations 179-180 See also RENFREW, C. 2007. Prehistory: The Making of the Human Mind. 2012 ed. London: Phoenix EBooks. Ch6

clear.’<sup>104</sup> It falls to government to make those choices, and they are potentially the most ‘wicked’ choices of all.

In making difficult policy choices, there is always a number of government options. The default tends to be to avoid the issue altogether until the problem is so salient that something must be done. This salience is increasingly dictated by public engagement and media coverage, or occasionally, particularly effective lobbying in Parliament. Once a wicked ethical issue is in the public domain, there is no shortage of ‘experts’ prepared to argue for one solution or another, and the most vociferous of these tend to be the more dogmatic. Thus, by the time government becomes engaged publicly in resolution of a wicked issue, there are often already well-established and entrenched positions, all of which will have an element of credibility sustained by selective presentation and interpretation of evidence, and a train of highly-opinionated supporters. It is the government task to bound the issue, consider the advice of genuine experts and to make decisions on behalf of the society it serves.

This thesis does not seek to investigate ethical, and in particular moral, positions *per se*, nor to pronounce judgement on government decisions, but simply to consider how those decisions have been made in one of the longest-standing and most wicked ongoing issues; nuclear deterrence policy. In doing so, it considers British government engagement with the public at key points in the development of British nuclear deterrence policy but in order to provide a contextual framework for this analysis, this chapter will consider the treatment of two other wicked issues created by scientific advances in highly emotive areas; human embryology and fertilisation and; genetically modified crops. The treatment of each of these issues has been very different, but the scope and symptoms of the ‘wickedness’ of the issues were similar.

### **Human Embryology and Fertilisation**

On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1978, a Top Secret report titled ‘Factors Relating to the Further Consideration of the Future of the United Kingdom Deterrent’<sup>105</sup> was submitted by the Cabinet Office to the Chancellor, Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary. The remainder of the Cabinet did not know of its existence. The Duff-Mason Report, as it became known, contributed substantially to the decision-making

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<sup>104</sup> BRIGGLE, A. & MITCHAM, C. 2012. *Ethics and Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.P9

<sup>105</sup> CABINET OFFICE Factors Relating to the Further Consideration of the Future of the United Kingdom Deterrent dated 7 Dec 1978. In: CABINET OFFICE (ed.). TNA DEFE 19/275.

process that culminated in 1982 with the Thatcher government decision to procure Trident from the USA. The process that led to that decision was considered in detail above. Another 'wicked' decision was playing out in exactly the same time-frame.

On 25 July 1978, baby Louise was born to parents Lesley and John Brown in Oldham Hospital; the first human being to be conceived outside the womb using an experimental technique to overcome infertility, In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF). The event caused an immediate media sensation, and a flurry of strongly opinionated moralistic posturing. On the same day, the government responded to a Parliamentary question asking 'what control is required over research involving human fertilisation in vitro and embryo transplants'<sup>106</sup> and whether the ethical and social aspects should be reviewed, by stating that;

'The techniques of human in vitro fertilisation and embryo transfer do not involve genetic manipulation in any way... the Medical Research Council ... would not support research in these fields until there was satisfactory evidence from work with animals of the safety of the techniques.'<sup>107</sup>

Of course, this did not address the question asked.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) had been aware of the development of IVF since 1971, but had not become involved either in supporting this life-changing medical procedure, or in inhibiting or supervising the development of this morally challenging genetic process. After Louise Brown's birth, the MRC established an 'Advisory Group to Review Policy on Research on In-Vitro Fertilisation and Embryo Transfer in Humans'. Its first meeting, in 1979, recorded; 'In 1971, an application from Mr PG Steptoe and Dr RG Edwards for long-term support of a programme of studies on human reproduction had been declined because of serious doubts about the ethical aspects of some of the proposed investigations...'<sup>108</sup> Having identified and expressed to itself serious ethical doubts, the MRC seems to have failed to identify that the issue at hand was not whether the research should be funded, but whether it should be authorised.

By 1982, the British Medical Association (BMA), the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Council of Churches and the Council for Science and

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<sup>106</sup> Mr L Abse MP; LEIRA, H. 2008. Justus Lipsius, political humanism and the disciplining of 17th century statecraft. *Review of International Studies*, 34, 669-692.

<sup>107</sup> Ms M Jackson MP; *ibid*.

<sup>108</sup> MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL Advisory Group to Review Policy on Research on In Vitro Fertilisation and Embryo Transfer in Humans: Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 6 March 1979. TNA FD7-2307.

Society had all established working parties in this field. Each of these bodies may have asserted authority within its own remit, but this 'wicked issue' transcended their areas of expertise and prerogative and none were sufficiently broadly based or sufficiently representative to be regarded as a source of authoritative advice to government. The Department of Education and Science advised the MRC;

'...These further developments raise difficult moral and legal questions – the rights of a child vis-à-vis its genetic and its biological parent; the responsibilities and liabilities of those handling human embryos; the circumstances in which an embryo developed in vitro might be kept or destroyed; and so on. Public concern about these issues has been focussed by recent reports in the press and on television, and there have been repeated calls both inside and outside Parliament, for a Government enquiry...'<sup>109</sup>

In July 1982, the Department of Health and Social Security(DHSS) announced a Government Enquiry into Human Fertilisation;

'...to consider recent and potential developments in medicine and science related to human fertilisation and embryology; to consider what policies and safeguards should be applied, including consideration of the social, ethical and legal implications of these developments, and to make recommendations.'<sup>110</sup>

Announcing the Enquiry, the Secretary of State for Social Services continued; 'Membership will be broad based and includes, as well as doctors and lawyers, other relevant professionals and those with experience in family policy and the child care fields; other 'lay' and religious viewpoints will also be represented...'<sup>111</sup> There had been no discussion of the impending enquiry at the MRC 'Advisory Group' meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1982, suggesting that this was not necessarily a government-wide initiative and there is no mention of the enquiry at all in Cabinet minutes prior to its establishment, although to be fair, the Cabinet was distracted by the Falklands War at the time.

The surviving files do not give a good indication of the government rationale for establishing the enquiry, although there is enough to determine that it was not at all universally popular in Whitehall. The best source of information on the establishment of the enquiry is actually the report of the Warnock Enquiry itself;

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<sup>109</sup> DEPT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE Department of Education and Science letter to Medical Research Council; "In Vitro Fertilisation: Possible Enquiry into Medical Ethics" dated 13 Apr 82. TNA FD7-2307.

<sup>110</sup> DHSS Press Release 82/230 - Government Enquiry into Human Fertilisation dated 23 July 1982. TNA FD7-2307.

<sup>111</sup> Mr N Fowler MP: GILL, D. J. 2009. Nuclear deterrence and the tradition of non-use. *International Affairs*, 85, 863-869.

‘... it was our task to attempt to discover the public good, in the widest sense, and to make recommendations in the light of that ... we had, in the words of one philosopher, to adopt ‘a steady and general point of view’. So, to this end, we have attempted in what follows to argue in favour of those positions which we have adopted, and to give due weight to the counter-arguments, where they exist.’<sup>112</sup>

### **Warnock and public perceptions of scientific development**

Warnock and her committee identified that one of the major intangible imperatives for the enquiry was the anxiety generated in the public mind by the developments in scientific and medical techniques. The Committee recognised from the outset that in a pluralistic society, one particular set of principles could never be completely accepted by everyone;

‘We recognised that within society there is a multiplicity of views on the issues before the Inquiry. We therefore decided to seek evidence from as many organisations, reflecting as many different perspectives, as possible. ... But even with submissions from so many organisations we have to record with regret that we did not receive evidence from as wide a range of minority and special interest groups as we would have liked, despite our best endeavours.’<sup>113</sup>

Analysis of the specific issues under consideration is not pertinent to this thesis, but a brief consideration of the bodies submitting evidence is instructive.

The list of bodies and individuals which provided evidence is considerable and includes 23 universities, 12 Royal Colleges, the High Court (Family Division), bodies representing all of the established religions in the UK, over 30 Local Authorities, local and national groups with a particular interest in the related issues, charities, individuals and the Trades Union Congress.<sup>114</sup> The MRC, already castigated in Parliament for its failure to identify the larger issues associated with human embryology, was one of the first expert bodies invited to present expert evidence to the Warnock enquiry.<sup>115</sup> Despite having been silent on the issue previously, the MRC promptly published ‘a statement on research relevant to human fertilisation and embryology in the British Medical Journal of 20<sup>th</sup> November.’<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> WARNOCK, M. 1984. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilization and Embryology. London: HMSO. Para 2

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. Ch 1 para 7

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. Pp95-98

<sup>115</sup> Mr L ABSE MP, LETWIN, S. R. 1976. Hobbes and Christianity. *Daedalus*, 105, 1-21. Col 279

<sup>116</sup> MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL Letter D409/191 dated 22 Nov 82. TNA FD7-2307.



Subsequent internal correspondence between the secretary of the Warnock Enquiry and the Chair of the MRC suggests that the relationship between the MRC and the Warnock Enquiry was not entirely harmonious; in a draft of a 'stock' Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) response to letters from the public on the issue, Dr Rashbass (chair of the MRC) struck out by hand the two paragraphs which had read; 'It would therefore be inappropriate for me to say anything at this point in time which might be seen as prejudicing the outcome of the inquiry under Mrs Warnock's chairmanship' and '... while I in no way wish to prejudice the inquiry's work...'<sup>117</sup>

Each of these stock phrases is used routinely within Whitehall to stress interdepartmental coherence, especially if there is none. That this section was regarded as necessary by the Warnock Enquiry is indicative of interdepartmental tensions, but that it was struck out by the MRC is, perhaps, more so.

The MRC publication of its evidence prior to presenting it to the Warnock Enquiry set a precedent which was followed by a number of other bodies which had hitherto been silent on the issue; The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal Society each published pamphlets outlining their position, prior to presenting to the Warnock Enquiry. Each of these publications was reported in the press at the time, pre-empting the Warnock Enquiry Report. If MRC &c attempted to influence the public debate prior to the publication of the Warnock Report, they probably succeeded, but the report literally had the last word. By addressing the issues that the evidence had raised in a measured and holistic fashion, the Warnock Enquiry took the rhetorical 'heat' out of the issue and enabled a genuinely informed and rational discussion in the media. Although the public was not spared headlines such as; 'Could my Husband be my Brother?'<sup>118</sup> it was also treated to more well-considered and balanced discussions such as Radio Four's flagship current affairs programme 'Analysis'.

In her subsequent analysis of the role of the Enquiry, Baroness Warnock recognised the constraints, and in articulating them, defined the crux of the matter under consideration in this thesis. 'One of the obvious difficulties is to establish what the moral sentiments of the public actually are. In a pluralistic society, such as ours, there is certain to be a wide diversity of views.'<sup>119</sup> This is a generic

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<sup>117</sup> WARNOCK INQUIRY Letter "Research Related to Human Fertilisation and Embryology" dated 25 Jan 83. TNA FD7/2307.

<sup>118</sup> DAILY MAIL. Could my Husband be my Brother? , 18 Oct 1983.

<sup>119</sup> WARNOCK, M. 1985. Moral Thinking and Government Policy: The Warnock Committee on Human Embryology. *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly; Health and Society*, 63, 19.P512

observation applicable to any ethical question, and when significant moral factors are involved, the difficulties are exacerbated;

‘The more certain people are of the correctness of their views, as a rule, the more vocal they are. It tends to be the hard-liners, in whichever direction, who tell their views abroad. And so there is a danger that ‘public opinion’ may come to be identified not with the views of the relatively confused, relatively open-minded majority, but with the views of the committed and the fanatical.’<sup>120</sup>

However, the reality has never been so pure and public opinion on ethically challenging issues has long had an influence on government policy.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, an increasing demand for human corpses for anatomical study and surgical training created an underground supporting industry of grave-robbers; ‘Without the bodies, which were illegally obtained through grave robbers, the work of many anatomists would not have been possible.’<sup>121</sup> In 1828, William Burke and William Hare bypassed the necessity of grave-robbery by simply murdering ten people and providing their bodies to the famous anatomist Doctor Robert Knox. Burke was hanged. (With deliberate bureaucratic irony, his body was dissected and his skeleton remains on display in the Medical School at Edinburgh University.) The *Lancet* reported at the time; ‘Government is already in a great degree, responsible for the crime which it has fostered by its negligence, and even encouraged by a system of forbearance.’<sup>122</sup> Only once the situation was publicised, did government act. ‘The Anatomy Act of 1832 provided an adequate supply of bodies for the teaching of anatomy, gradually putting out of business resurrectionists: the end stooped to justify the means...’<sup>123</sup>

Warnock further elaborated the limitations of her Committee; ‘The role of an Inquiry such as ours can only be to try to get it right, and above all to consider the moral arguments on each side, such as they are, and to set them out with clarity. This will help Ministers to make whatever case they decide to make, with a view to persuading Parliament.’<sup>124</sup> She rather wryly observed that ‘... it is probable that Ministers hoped for more from us than they got. They may have hoped for a

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.P513

<sup>121</sup> OLR, R. 1999. Body Snatchers: the Hidden Side of the History of Anatomy. *Journal of the International Society of Plastination*, 14, 6-9. P8

<sup>122</sup> Traffic in Dead Bodies. *Lancet*, 1828, 818-21.

<sup>123</sup> OLR, R. 1999. Body Snatchers: the Hidden Side of the History of Anatomy. *Journal of the International Society of Plastination*, 14, 6-9. P8

<sup>124</sup> WARNOCK, M. 1985. Moral Thinking and Government Policy: The Warnock Committee on Human Embryology. *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly; Health and Society*, 63, 19.P513

solution to the problems, and a clear unanimous voice explaining what was right and what was wrong. In this we failed, and rightly so.’<sup>125</sup>

Warnock’s point here is significant – she regarded the function of the Enquiry not to determine the ‘right’ answer, but to consider and present all aspects of the wicked issues. She further described the need to ‘... sift through and sort out the facts that are relevant to decision making. But it has to be recognised that there is no such thing as a moral expert’<sup>126</sup> and even if there were, the balance of deontological factors in each individual is unique, so no two people ever see eye to eye on every issue. Lippmann argued nearly 100 years ago that the legitimacy of an expert ‘depends upon separating himself from those who make the decisions, upon not caring, in his expert self, what decision is made,’<sup>127</sup> and Pielke echoes this in a more modern context; ‘Because scientific results always have some degree of uncertainty and a range of means is typically available to achieve particular objectives, the task of political advocacy necessarily involves considerations that go well beyond science.’<sup>128</sup>

### **Warnock and experts**

But, as Warnock argues, ‘the only reason to call such people ‘experts’ is so that their conclusions may be accepted as authoritative without question. Other people, both Ministers who have sought their advice and society at large, must be prepared to say ‘the experts have decided that this and that are right; and we must go along with it.’<sup>129</sup> This is particularly pertinent for wicked issues which often have powerful deontological considerations; ‘Now in matters of life and death, matters of birth and of the family with which we were concerned in the Report, no one is going to give up his beliefs without a struggle. No one is going to accept what someone else thinks right just because he is told he should.’<sup>130</sup> Warnock touches on two issues common to government handling of complex ethical issues; a tendency to defer to experts (so long as the expert opinion matches the government inclination), and the position and definition of ‘experts’. This is true of the Warnock Enquiry, and many other

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. P519

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. P513

<sup>127</sup> BRIGGLE, A. & MITCHAM, C. 2012. *Ethics and Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. P241

<sup>128</sup> PIELKE JR, R. A. 2004. When scientists politicize science: making sense of controversy over The Skeptical Environmentalist. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 7, 405-417. p406

<sup>129</sup> WARNOCK, M. 1985. Moral Thinking and Government Policy: The Warnock Committee on Human Embryology. *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly; Health and Society*, 63, 19.p520

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p520

contemporary wicked issues where a government Enquiry is established in order to provide 'expert' advice to ministers.

After the report of the Enquiry in July 1984, government established an interim Licensing Authority to regulate work on in-vitro fertilisation until legislation could be introduced based on the Enquiry's report. There were two unsuccessful challenges to the Enquiry's recommendations in Parliament; in 1985 (the 'Unborn Children Protection Bill' which sought to prohibit embryo research and limit artificial insemination only for named women to bear children); and a similar bill in 1986. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act was introduced in 1990 and came into force in 1991, establishing the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in 1991. Since then, a number of statutes of limited scope have been introduced to manage embryology, but none have elicited the public interest that the original enquiry generated.

In 1978, any government action, including inaction, would have been vilified by one or other lobby within this particular wicked issue. Even after the establishment of the Warnock Committee, various lobbies, including other government bodies, attempted to influence the public debate prior to the publication of the Enquiry Report by publishing their evidence to the enquiry, effectively monopolising the 'narrative' in the public domain for short periods. This clearly resulted in short periods of criticism for the government. But in the longer run, the Enquiry balanced the opposing views of the various lobbies, and delivered an objective assessment of the risks associated with all of the issues. This allowed the government to remove the highly emotive rhetoric characteristic of many of the lobbies, and to legislate in an environment that was much more level-headed and representative of a genuinely well-informed public debate; a circumstance sadly lacking on occasion elsewhere.

### **Genetically Modified (GM) Crops**

The advent of genetic engineering has allowed the modification of crops to provide greater yields or resistance to pests thus enhancing productivity. However, food scares and lurid media headlines about 'Frankenstein Foods'<sup>131</sup> or 'Mutant Porkies'<sup>132</sup> in the late 1990s fuelled British public concern about the safety of these techniques. government figures indicated that in 2002, '68% of UK adults claimed to be very or fairly concerned about food safety issues.'<sup>133</sup> As above, it was this

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<sup>131</sup> 'Meat may be Tainted by Frankenstein Food': Daily Mail 06 July 1999

<sup>132</sup> 'Mutant Porkies on the Menu': News of the World, 23/05/99

<sup>133</sup> FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY Consumer Views of GM Food dated 2003. London: HMSO. Para 3.1

public perception of this wicked issue that drove government action. The Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) was established in 2000 to 'look at current and future developments in biotechnology which have implications for agriculture and the environment, and to advise the Government on their ethical and social implications and their public acceptability.'<sup>134</sup>

It is illuminating that the Commission's 2001 report recommended that;

'It will be crucial for the public to be involved in the important decisions which need to be taken. We have to find a way to foster informed public discussion of the development and application of new technologies: whatever decisions are ultimately reached, they will be more palatable if they have not been taken behind closed doors.'<sup>135</sup>

The AEBC report made explicit the recognition of the importance of public education and, at least the feeling of, engagement in decision-making of this type and it recommended active public participation in a national debate about GM Crops.

Critical to that process is the question of risk perception. As described above, there is a tendency to defer to 'experts', of which scientists and medical professionals certainly form a cohort. But for significant scientific breakthroughs in areas of intense ethical interest such as genetic modification or IVF, the issue becomes an intrinsically wicked one, where the scientific experts view the associated risks from an informed perspective not shared by the public. Often, the public perception is substantially informed by media coverage, which is why headlines such as those above, or 'GM food threatens the planet'<sup>136</sup> and 'M&S sells genetically modified Frankenplants'<sup>137</sup> are so pernicious.

### **Understanding Risk**

One contemporary analyst suggests;

'The technical definition of risk is 'the likelihood of adverse consequences from any hazard', but that is not the way the public sees risk. It does not explain why some risks trigger so much more alarm, anxiety or outrage than others, seemingly regardless of scientific estimates of their seriousness.'<sup>138</sup>

The perception of risk in a simple binary decision is significantly complicated if there are diverse potential outcomes of which some are bad, but of very low likelihood,

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<sup>134</sup> AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT BIOTECHNOLOGY COMMISSION Crops on Trial; A Report by the AEBC dated Sept 2001. London: HMSO. Para 2

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. para 68

<sup>136</sup> Observer, 20/06/99

<sup>137</sup> Independent on Sunday, 18/07/99

<sup>138</sup> BURKE, D. 2004. GM food and crops: what went wrong in the UK? *EMBO Reports*, 5, 432-436.

and some are good, and of a high likelihood, or usually, some combination of good and bad outcomes. Expertise could be alleged to provide the basis for an objective decision amongst these competing outcomes:

‘Many risk experts resist the pressure to consider [public] outrage in making risk management decisions; they insist that ‘the data’ alone, not the ‘irrational’ public, should determine policy. But we have two decades of data indicating that voluntariness, control, fairness, and the rest are important components of our society’s definition of risk.’<sup>139</sup>

Certainly that challenge was an element in the composition of the Warnock Inquiry above, but as she insisted; ‘it has to be recognized that there is no such thing as a moral expert.’<sup>140</sup> The deontological position seems to default to a demand for no risk (ie zero probability) of a morally unacceptable outcome, regardless of the potential benefits. Those who take this position seldom appear to have responsibility for the provision of the potential benefits to society, and such dramatic oversimplification is characteristic of the majority of media coverage of such complex issues.

One could infer from the various (incomplete) records of the handling of the genetic modification of crops issue that government had long understood the importance of inclusive decision making; ‘Public attitudes have long been identified as one of the key determinants of the development, application and subsequent technological evolution of technology.’<sup>141</sup> The AEBC report went on to recommend the format of the GM debate and stipulated that it should ‘... include, but not be dominated by, the Government and current interest groups – the biotechnology and farming industries, NGOs, and scientists. But to have public credibility and added value over the current level of debate, they must reach beyond these interests to a wider public.’<sup>142</sup> In the event, the AEBC commissioned a series of Farm Scale Evaluations in 2003-04 and simultaneously, the government commissioned a GM Public Debate as part of a wider GM Dialogue which also incorporated a review of a scientific review and a cost benefit analysis but was not made public. The Public Debate was held; ‘Over a thousand people attended the six regional launch

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<sup>139</sup> SANDMAN, P. 1987b. Risk Communication: Facing Public Outrage. *EPA Journal (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)*, 1987, 21-22.

<sup>140</sup> WARNOCK, M. 1985. Moral Thinking and Government Policy: The Warnock Committee on Human Embryology. *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly; Health and Society*, 63, 19. P513

<sup>141</sup> FREWER, L. J., HOWARD, C. & SHEPHERD, R. 1997. Public Concerns in the United Kingdom about General and Specific Applications of Genetic Engineering: Risk, Benefit, and Ethics. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 22, 98-124.

<sup>142</sup> AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT BIOTECHNOLOGY COMMISSION Crops on Trial; A Report by the AEBC dated Sept 2001. London: HMSO. Para 69

meetings and it has been estimated that a further 675 local meetings were organised across the UK...<sup>143</sup> 35000 feedback forms and 1200 letters or emails were received by the Steering Board. A report was produced and in 2004, after the Farm Scale Evaluations reported, the government simply aligned its position within EU legislation.<sup>144</sup>

What is pertinent to this thesis is the lesson that this exercise in public consultation provided for the government. In a specifically commissioned report, DEFRA noted ‘... the debate generated ‘unprecedented levels of interest, participation and considered discussion about complex matters of science and policy amongst a relatively large number of the general public.’<sup>145</sup> That report acknowledged the context of wider government efforts to engage with the public on issues raised by scientific and technological development and specifically, it comments that ‘it is also important to consider what lessons can be learned from the debate process, to help inform future public engagement activities.’<sup>146</sup>

An Independent Commission was more credible in the eyes of the public, although more difficult to manage, and the process itself helped to educate the public. The Minister responsible had written to the Chair of the Commission in February 2001; ‘I am convinced that the issue of separation distances is not simply a matter of science, but equally a question of public acceptability.’<sup>147</sup> Despite Mr Meacher’s rather patronising view; the report recognised that the public had been more discriminating in its use of evidence than expected, noting ‘It is clear that the public like to know who is advancing a particular view, and whether it is supported by evidence.’<sup>148</sup>

These episodes suggest increasingly sophisticated government understanding of the part played by public opinion in complex decision making. The Warnock Inquiry was a successful experiment in the use of ‘experts’ to inform both government and public in an ethically challenging area of technological progress. The GM Debate

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<sup>143</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS The GM Public Debate: Lesson Learned from the Process dated March 2004. London: HMSO. Para 2

<sup>144</sup> AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT BIOTECHNOLOGY COMMISSION Crops on Trial; A Report by the AEBC dated Sept 2001. London: HMSO.

<sup>145</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS The GM Public Debate: Lesson Learned from the Process dated March 2004. London: HMSO. Para 2

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. para 4

<sup>147</sup> Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions letter (Michael Meacher Minister of State DETR) to Chair AEBC (undated and unreferenced) reproduced in AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT BIOTECHNOLOGY COMMISSION Crops on Trial; A Report by the AEBC dated Sept 2001. London: HMSO.

<sup>148</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS The GM Public Debate: Lesson Learned from the Process dated March 2004. London: HMSO. para 22

specifically included the public as part of the wider GM Dialogue within government and this appears to be a logical progression from the 1970 report, through the Warnock Inquiry findings. It is also echoed by Lord Robertson's intent for the Strategic Defence Review for which he insisted on an extensive public engagement strategy.<sup>149</sup>

'Experts' and public have different risk perceptions. The government reports suggest that the public is more discriminating when faced with conflicting evidence than government tends to give it credit for, but public understanding can be significantly affected by expert opinion and, it appears, media presentation. The handling of the GM Debate does hint that government tends to patronise the public and expect deference to experts if their opinion coincides with government inclination.<sup>150</sup> The conclusion that appears to be drawn by the government is 'We take public concern very seriously, and we have weighed public opinion alongside the scientific evidence ... [we will] consider the best ways of providing the information which the public wants and in an open and transparent way.'<sup>151</sup> This conclusion is specific to the GM debate, but could reasonably be extrapolated to other wicked issues.

### **The Nuclear Debate**

There has been no similar inquiry established to consider UK nuclear deterrence in the broadest sense. It could be argued that there is no need because there are only two departments of state to which nuclear deterrence is pertinent; the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence (coordinated through the Cabinet Office) and they already collaborate on policy formulation and the delivery of capabilities. Similarly, it could be argued that there have been numerous MOD and Cabinet Office enquiries into the strategic nuclear deterrent. But because so many of the details are classified, the findings cannot be made public, except in carefully edited inputs to public documents. One such was the 1980 'Open Government Document 80/23' which, even so, contained more information and detail than many of the Cabinet considered appropriate. The detail of how this was achieved and managed, and the associated studies and decisions prior to the deployment of Trident has been considered above, and more contemporary work will be considered below. This is

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<sup>149</sup> LORD ROBERTSON Interview with A Corbett 12 November 2014.

<sup>150</sup> Arguably, the most pronounced recent example of such divergence in defence strategy might be the decision to engage in the Iraq Conflict in 2003. Whilst this would be a fascinating line of enquiry, it is not substantively pertinent to this thesis, and will merit a canon of theses in itself once the records of the 2002/2003 decisions are released.

<sup>151</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS The GM Dialogue: Government Response dated 9 March 2004. London: HMSO. Para 1



not to say that there have not been inquiries or debates about nuclear deterrence held publically by various organisations, merely that the government has not participated.

## Chapter Eight – Conclusions: British Nuclear Deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*'We have to find a way to foster informed public discussion of the development and application of new technologies ... At present, there seem to be no avenues for a genuine, open, influential debate with inclusive procedures, which does not marginalise the reasonable scepticism and wide body of intelligent opinion outside specialist circles.'*<sup>1</sup>

This quote, from the 2001 government report on genetic modification of crops, seems to encapsulate a persistent problem for government that is prevalent in more than just the agriculture domain. It is striking that the same frustrations appear perennially across Whitehall but there is no cross-government remedial action plan.

### Introduction – is this important?

This thesis has considered the factors that affected British government engagement with the public on deterrence policy and demonstrated that many appear to have their roots in the experience of the First and Second World Wars. Despite occasions where the government of the day has decided to engage more with the public in order to explain or justify particular policy and procurement decisions, such engagement has seldom come to fruition; probably the most notable exception being OGD 80/23. The previous chapters have considered the historical evidence supporting this assertion. In conclusion, this chapter will consider British government engagement with the public between the end of the Cold War and the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, a period which has seen fundamental changes in the international security architecture and British defence, security and foreign policy objectives.

The 2015 YouGov poll conducted for Prospect Magazine on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in July 2015 was designed to gauge public attitudes to defence spending and the decision to replace Trident.<sup>2</sup> The survey suggests that about 1/3 of those polled thought the use of atomic weapons in the circumstances of 1945 was appropriate, about 1/3 thought it wrong, and the other third had no definite opinion. Among those under 25, and amongst women, a higher proportion thought the use of atomic bombs was wrong. Only about 1/10 think nuclear weapons make Britain less safe, with just under 1/2 thinking that they make us safer. About 1/3 would prefer like-for-like replacement for the Trident

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<sup>1</sup> AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT BIOTECHNOLOGY COMMISSION Crops on Trial; A Report by the AEBC dated Sept 2001. London: HMSO. Para 68

<sup>2</sup> KELLNER, P. 2015. Do we want Trident? Most people want to protect defence spending - even at the expense of other services. Prospect. August 2015 ed. London: Prospect Magazine. p14

system, with about just under 1/3 preferring a cheaper nuclear deterrent and about 1/5 advocating unilateral disarmament. In Scotland, about 2/5 advocate unilateral disarmament. Kellner concludes 'Whether we regard nuclear weapons as a useful deterrent against bad behaviour or an insurance policy in case things go badly wrong, or simply as a symbol of national pride, most of us want the UK to keep them.'<sup>3</sup>

To a certain extent Kellner's terminology encapsulates one of the issues facing early 21<sup>st</sup> Century government; nuclear deterrence appears a very familiar and simple concept, but a dwindling minority of increasingly focused specialists is familiar with its key tenets and principles. Much of the commentary both inside and outside government is inconsistent, with inaccurate language and riddled with misleading metaphors. Nuclear deterrence is not an insurance policy that mitigates outcomes if things go badly wrong; it is part of a range of mechanisms that help prevent things going wrong. Caricaturing 'National pride' or 'prestige' can trivialise the genuine security and foreign policy benefits to the United Kingdom of a 'place at the top table'; United Nations Security Council permanent membership is not an inconsequential national interest.<sup>4</sup>

The use of inaccurate terminology is widespread: the options provided to its 'Opinion-Formers' Panel' in the 2013 YouGov poll were; 'Britain should disband Trident and focus defence spending on conventional weapons and forces; Britain should replace Trident with a new and upgraded system; Britain should maintain Trident; Don't know; Other.'<sup>5</sup> The YouGov analysis based on the result was; The most popular option, with over a third agreeing (36%), was for Britain to '... disband Trident and focus defence spending on conventional weapons and forces ...'<sup>6</sup> However, this poll actually shows that an absolute majority (52%) of the opinion formers desires the retention of the nuclear deterrent (25% felt it should be maintained and a further 27% that it should be upgraded) but the inaccuracy of the language used by the poll skewed the result, and the analysis headline.

The choice facing the government in 2016 is not to replace Trident; it will continue until the 2040s. The choice is to replace the submarines carrying it which will reach the end of their service lives in the 2020s. The 2016 Parliamentary Briefing Paper

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> BAYLIS, J. & STODDART, K. 2014. *The British Nuclear Experience: The Roles of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford, OUP. P207-209

<sup>5</sup> FOLWELL, A. 2014. Opinion Formers Poll: Views on Trident highly Politicised as Scotland vote Approaches. Politics, Reputation Research, Scotland, UK. London: YouGov.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

'Replacing the UK's Trident Nuclear Deterrent' perpetuates these inaccuracies, although it does state on page 6 that; 'Although commonly referred to as 'the renewal or replacement of Trident', the Successor programme is about the design, development and manufacture of a new class of four submarines.'<sup>7</sup> The executive summary for this briefing paper considers 14 polls of public opinion since 2009 and suggests that;

'a review of the available opinion poll evidence does suggest that, broadly speaking, the British public is divided on the question of whether Trident should be renewed. However, the public's views on Trident are nuanced and their responses to public opinion polls are sensitive to the wording and framing of the question they are asked.'<sup>8</sup>

Better understanding and information seems to be in order.

In a commentary on the result of the Brexit vote in the UK, populist Professor Brian Cox concluded that education is an important national security issue; 'What you rely on in an open democracy is the ability of people to take an informed position but we're not teaching people how to think and we are becoming unstable as democratic societies.'<sup>9</sup> His core point is not that the state should teach the public 'what' to think, but 'how'; a democratic population must be equipped with the intellectual analytical tools to consider assertions made in the media in terms of provenance and determine which are valid, and which are mere polemic. As the government report quoted at the head of this chapter notes, 'We have to find a way to foster informed public discussion.' This is particularly true for all ethically complex policy areas, including human embryology, genetic modification of crops, and nuclear deterrence.

### **Nuclear deterrence theory in the 21st Century**

In a Facebook thread circulated amongst the doctoral candidates at Cambridge University in July 2016, the decision flowchart below was published, but not challenged, in a medium in which such assertive polemic is usually hotly contested.

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<sup>7</sup> MILLS, C. 2016. Briefing Paper 7353: Replacing the UKs 'Trident' Nuclear Deterrent. In: HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY (ed.). London: HMSO.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p10

<sup>9</sup> COX, B. & FORSHAW, J. 2016. Education is as important to Security as Aircraft Carriers or Missile Defence. The Big Issue. 21 Nov 2016 ed. London: William Gibbons.

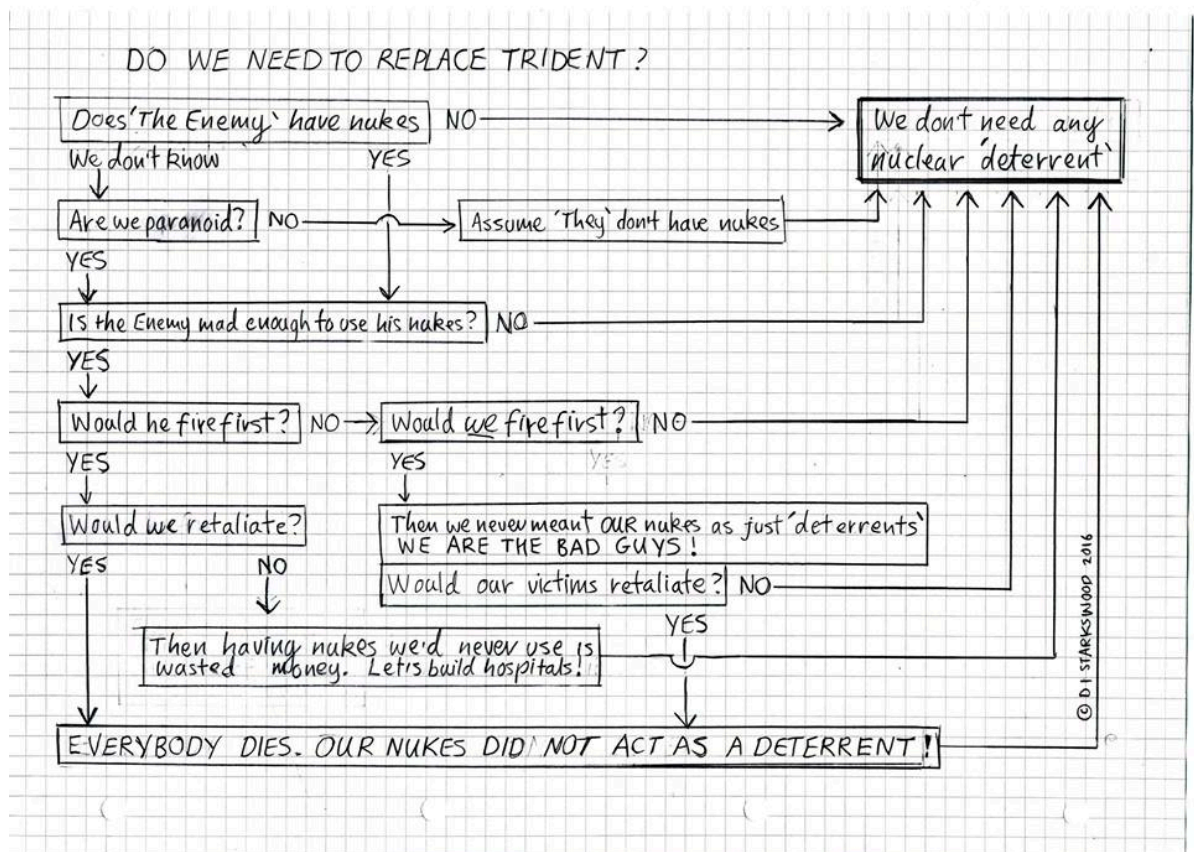


Figure 1: Do we need to replace Trident? Facebook circulated Decision Flow Chart<sup>10</sup>

Nuclear deterrence is a complex matter based on a very simple foundation. It is defined in the Trident Alternatives Review; 'Deterrence rests on the notion of "unacceptable loss" - the ability to inflict a level of damage that a potential aggressor would judge outweighed any benefit they might gain by a particular course of action.'<sup>11</sup> The risk of damage to which an aggressor would be exposed through an attack against conventional defences is determined and controlled by the aggressor and is subject to a straightforward risk-benefit analysis, and the aggressor can decide when to stop if aggression is proving too costly. If, however, the defender has nuclear weapons, the aggressor must consider the prospect that the defender reserves to himself the ability to respond at a level of punitive retaliation entirely of

<sup>10</sup> STARKSWOOD, D. 2016. Do we need to replace Trident [Online]. Available: <https://www.facebook.com/ThatDamnedIdealistAgain?lst=100000442255266%3A606372421%3A1483013236> [Accessed 29 Dec 2016].

<sup>11</sup> UK GOVT Trident Alternatives Review 16 July 2013. London: HMSO. Paragraph 1

his own choosing; the aggressor loses control of the level of risk to which he is exposed.<sup>12</sup>

This ownership of the level of risk to which the aggressor is exposed is the essential difference between policies of deterrence by denial (conventional deterrence; defence) and deterrence by punishment (the threat of retaliation). The box in Figure One titled 'Is the enemy mad enough to use his nukes?' should reflect a decision which would be something like; 'would the enemy be deterred from the use of his nuclear weapons by the threat of retaliation?' with outputs that would most appropriately read; 'perhaps not' and 'probably'. Starkswood's flowchart at Figure One fails to discriminate between nuclear deterrence and the use of nuclear weapons, and it reduces international security concerns to categorical answers where the reality is an infinity of variable probabilities. What is perhaps of more concern, however, is that none of the cohort of potential opinion formers to whom this diagram was circulated felt able, or motivated, to challenge it. The nature of social media such as Facebook is that they tend to consist of self-referencing circles of like-minded thinkers, so on one level, a lack of challenge might be expected. But the nature of this particular cohort is that it is self-referencing only in the sense that it distributes posts, in order to challenge them. One member noted subsequently; 'I didn't challenge it – I should have done and it's interesting that I didn't. I didn't agree with it, but didn't know how to challenge it.'<sup>13</sup>

The decision-making process of a potential aggressor contemplating coercion or aggression against a nuclear armed state<sup>14</sup> is complicated by nuclear deterrence. However, for most 21<sup>st</sup> Century states, nuclear weapons have no unique military utility; there are very few military facilities that could not be successfully attacked with conventional means and the ability to destroy those facilities with nuclear weapons is no more of a deterrent than the ability to destroy them with precision guided conventional munitions. The deterrent effect of nuclear weapons relies on something else. As Attlee grasped intuitively 70 years ago, '...the only deterrent is the possibility of the victim of such an attack [on cities] being able to retort on the victor.'<sup>15</sup> The difference in the political effect of nuclear deterrence is this unique

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<sup>12</sup> CORBETT, A. S. 2016. Deterring Nuclear Russia in the 21st Century; Theory and Practice. *NATO Defense College Research Report*. Rome: NATO Defense College.

<sup>13</sup> CORBETT, A. S. Facebook Circulated Decision Flow Chart; a conversation at Cambridge University Sept 2016.

<sup>14</sup> I differentiate between nuclear weapon states recognised by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and nuclear armed states (Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea) which are not.

<sup>15</sup> ATTLEE, C. GEN 75/3 The Atomic Bomb: Letter from the Prime Minister to President Truman 25 September 1945. TNA CAB 130/3

fear that nuclear weapons engender. An aggressor must consider that as a last resort, and regardless of peacetime assurances, a nuclear-armed defender might target an aggressor's population centres.

Quinlan, the key author of the 1980 Open Government Document<sup>16</sup> noted;

‘... the language was deliberately chosen - partly with ethical concerns in mind - to convey that while cities would not be guaranteed immunity, the UK approach to deterrent threat and operational planning in the Trident era would not rely on crude counter-city or counter-population concepts.’<sup>17</sup>

Although not palatable, the cornerstone of UK national security strategy relies on nuclear deterrence, which is based on the contingent willingness to threaten civilian populations and, as Windham Goldie argued above for The War Game; ‘...the people should be trusted with the truth...’<sup>18</sup> No modern democratic state openly advocates a deterrence policy that explicitly threatens non-combatants, and the examples from the First and Second World Wars above catalogue historical British reticence about just such thinking. But it is, although probably not deliberately, still tacitly confirmed in public statements. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon wondered; ‘... how would the United States or France respond if we suddenly announced that we were abandoning our nuclear capabilities, yet will still expect them to pick up the tab and to put their cities at risk to protect us in a nuclear crisis?’<sup>19</sup> Fallon went on to describe the British independent nuclear deterrent as ‘... minimum, credible, assured and independent...’<sup>20</sup>

### **A minimum deterrent**

Much of the technical debate above (chapters 5 and 6) on Chevaline and the Polaris replacement centred on the precept of a minimum deterrent. The ‘Moscow Criterion’<sup>21</sup> was a measure of how little destructive power would be required in order to deter the most credible threat; at that time, the Soviet Union. The debate was conducted in extreme secrecy; in 2007 Lord Owen argued that ‘Of course we had to

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<sup>16</sup> UK GOVT 1980. The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force. London: HMSO.

<sup>17</sup> QUINLAN, M. 2009. Thinking About Nuclear Weapons; Principles, Problems, Prospects, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>18</sup> BBC WAC T56/263/1 Wheldon to Kenneth Adam 31 Dec 64 quoted in CHAPMAN, J. 2006. The BBC and the Censorship of The War Game (1965). Journal of Contemporary History, 41, 75-94. P85

<sup>19</sup> FALLON, M. 2016. *The case for the retention of the UK's independent nuclear deterrent; Speech at the Policy Exchange 23 March 2016* [Online]. London: HMSO. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-case-for-the-retention-of-the-uks-independent-nuclear-deterrent> [Accessed 22 November 2016].

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> STODDART, K. 2008. Maintaining the ‘Moscow Criterion’: British Strategic Nuclear Targeting 1974–1979. Journal of Strategic Studies, 31, 897-924.

keep it private. One was not in those days able to let the Soviet Union know that one had doubts about one's own deterrent capacity...<sup>22</sup> He was making this argument in the context of his request for the government to release the papers from that period, in order to inform a similar analysis of minimum deterrent for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, arguing:

‘A minimum nuclear deterrent is not, however, a static concept. If we are to start, in 2010, the process of genuinely contributing to the elimination of nuclear weapons, it will not be credible if the British government commits to a new UK ballistic missile deterrent similar to Trident into the years 2050-60.’<sup>23</sup>

Owen considered that the blanket application of ‘secrecy’ to the nuclear deterrent mission continues to be just as much an inhibition on effective public engagement as it was for Macmillan, Callaghan and Thatcher.

The 1998 Strategic Defence Review (SDR) announced; ‘We will retain our nuclear deterrent with fewer warheads to meet our twin challenges of minimum credible deterrence backed by a firm commitment to arms control.’ The SDR reduced the UK stockpile from 300 to less than 200 operationally available warheads, and from a limit of 96 warheads to 48 per submarine, at a reduced day-to-day alert state.<sup>24</sup> The 2006 White Paper which committed to the initial development of the Vanguard class successor submarines stated; ‘...it will be the minimum necessary. We already have the smallest stockpile of nuclear warheads among the recognised nuclear weapon states and are the only state to have reduced to a single delivery system.’<sup>25</sup> Both the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review<sup>26</sup> and the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review<sup>27</sup> refer to a minimum deterrent, without stipulating what level of destructive potential that involves, although the minimum deterrent in 2006 was reduced to up to 48 warheads on each submarine,<sup>28</sup> and in 2010 further reduced to 40. There is detailed study conducted in support of these decisions, the nature and results of which are obviously extremely classified (as Commanding

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<sup>22</sup> HL Debate 24 January 2007 Armed Forces: Nuclear Deterrent. HANSARD Vol 688 cc1129-1131. Col 1130

<sup>23</sup> OWEN, D. 2009. Nuclear Papers, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press. p17

<sup>24</sup> UK GOVT 1998. Strategic Defence Review. London: TSO. Foreword paragraph 8 and chapter 4 paragraphs 66-68

<sup>25</sup> UK GOVT 2006. The future of the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent: the White Paper CM6994. London: HMSO.

<sup>26</sup> UK GOVT Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: CM7948. London: HMSO. Foreword p5

<sup>27</sup> UK GOVT National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom. CM 9161. London: HMSO. P34 paragraph 4.65

<sup>28</sup> UK GOVT 2006. The future of the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent: the White Paper CM6994. London: HMSO. p13 Highlight Box 2.1



Officer of one of the Vanguard class submarines I was not aware of the details). The 2013 Trident Alternatives Review, conducted by Whitehall departments to meet the demands of the Coalition government, is a fascinating resource for research because it exposes more of the rationale, if not the numbers, behind such arcane calculations than the White Papers: The key determining requirement for the 'Trident Alternatives Review' was;

"A minimum nuclear deterrent capability that, during a crisis, is able to deliver at short notice a nuclear strike against a range of targets at an appropriate scale and with very high confidence.' The study deliberately did not define 'minimum', 'short notice', 'scale' or 'very high confidence' as that could have overly-constrained the list of system options for analysis.'<sup>29</sup>

Intuitively, a minimum deterrent seems morally desirable over a more substantial capability, but a recent sophisticated analysis of contemporary US nuclear deterrence policy puts even this apparently simple logic under intense scrutiny:

'Minimum deterrence is a mode of deterrence that depends on the threat of nuclear retaliation alone and makes no effective accommodation for the principles of discrimination and proportionality or for a theory of deterrence that depends on putting at risk those things most valued by enemy leadership. ... But retaliation against cities would violate the principles of discrimination and proportionality, and thus U.S. deterrence strategy requires being able to put at risk other assets in an enemy country that enemy leaders would not want to lose.'<sup>30</sup>

This supports the assertion that nuclear deterrence works because of the fear of an attack on cities. That said, American and British understanding of what causes wars and therefore how to manage and deter them differ slightly, and this has a fundamental effect on theories of deterrence and associated ethics. The USA provides 'extended nuclear deterrence', for a number of its allies, including NATO. In order for such extended deterrence to be credible to a potential adversary, it requires an ability to be graduated in order to offer a capability to respond in proportion to the aggression being deterred; a threat of a strategic nuclear response to a border incursion by a reconnaissance aircraft in, say, Bulgarian airspace, would be literally incredible and morally untenable.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the ethical justification for 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> UK GOVT Trident Alternatives Review 16 July 2013. London: HMSO. P14 paragraph 1.9

<sup>30</sup> ROBERTS, B. 2016. The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. p35

<sup>31</sup> This is the logic that drove Healey and others in the 1960s to consider a graduated deterrence policy for NATO, which became more commonly known as flexible response. The implications of this hypothesis are considered at; CORBETT, A. S. 2016. Deterring Nuclear Russia in the 21st

century American nuclear deterrence presented by Roberts incorporates Just War concepts of proportionality, and therefore discrimination, in a way that a British independent nuclear deterrence tailored as a last resort for national survival does not. In this author's experience, there is no strategic discourse in Britain at this level of complexity.

### **A credible and assured deterrent**

The credibility of any deterrence policy depends on a combination of the resolve to carry it out and the capability which includes readiness, reach, survivability/ invulnerability and destructive power.<sup>32</sup>

Reach and survivability/ invulnerability are functions of the delivery system.

Uniquely amongst the nuclear weapon states, the UK has reverted to a single nuclear weapon system; the Trident submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM). The USA and Russia maintain a triad of submarine, ground-based and air-launched nuclear weapon systems, France maintains both submarine and air launched systems and China maintains submarine and ground launched systems. Each system has strengths and weaknesses; ground launched intercontinental ballistic missiles have a significant reach and in-flight survivability, but are vulnerable to attack pre-launch. Free-fall bombs are as vulnerable as the aircraft on which they are embarked (but as a system very flexible for messaging resolve to an opponent in an extended deterrence strategy), air-launched cruise missiles are similarly vulnerable to modern air defences, and all aircraft are critically vulnerable on the ground. These vulnerabilities tend to demand very high fidelity intelligence and warning capabilities, with a correspondingly high readiness of the nuclear forces, especially in a crisis. This can have an inflammatory effect of its own although it can also be used as an indication of resolve and an active part of a sophisticated deterrence system particularly appropriate for extended deterrence such as the USA provides for NATO.

A submarine-launched ballistic missile offers an assured second response system; it is not subtle and cannot be readily employed for messaging but it provides a credible threat of a guaranteed response *in extremis*, even if the parent state is attacked in a bolt-from-the-blue surprise attack. The defender does not have to specify what this response would be, but a potential aggressor must consider the

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Century; Theory and Practice. *NATO Defense College Research Report*. Rome: NATO Defense College.

<sup>32</sup> UK GOVT Trident Alternatives Review 16 July 2013. London: HMSO. Paragraph 7

prospect that a nuclear weapon state faced with a threat to its vital national interests or its survival could retaliate against any element of the aggressor state.<sup>33</sup>

The perception of the agent being deterred is critical; if the defender's resolve is not evident to the aggressor before the aggressor makes decisions, a policy of deterrence is less likely to be effective. The everyday peacetime communication of capability and resolve is therefore fundamental to a policy of deterrence. Contemporary British defence policy is more predicated on deterrence than ever before, with the Foreword to the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) stating;

‘we have reconfigured Britain’s Armed Forces so they are able to deal with modern and evolving threats. Where necessary, we will be ready to use force. ... we will use ... our soft power to promote British values and to tackle the causes of the security threats we face, not just their consequences.’<sup>34</sup>

The theme of deterrence in preference to conflict is repeated throughout SDSR 2015; ‘We will strengthen our Armed Forces and our security and intelligence agencies so that they remain world-leading. They project our power globally, and will fight and work alongside our close allies ... to deter or defeat our adversaries.’<sup>35</sup> SDSR 2015 introduces an interpretation of deterrence that appears to move away from ‘conventional deterrence’ and ‘nuclear deterrence’ to deterrence using the ‘full spectrum of our capabilities to ... deter potential adversaries, including through renewal of our nuclear deterrent.’<sup>36</sup>

This innovative interpretation of the concept of deterrence stems from a project led by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) and potentially heralds one of the most fundamental changes in national deterrence and defence policy in recent years. It is a significant evolution and will require more than a simple statement to enable it fully; coherent ‘full spectrum’ deterrence will require departments of state to coordinate their activities in order to achieve a tailored effect against a potential adversary that some may not yet consider a problem. One early step towards this has been the formation of the Cabinet Office Communications Steering Group which includes representation from Cabinet Office, MOD, FCO and

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<sup>33</sup> SCHELLING, T. C. 2008. *Arms and Influence*. Kindle 2008 ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. pp185-188

<sup>34</sup> UK GOVT National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: *A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*. CM 9161. London: HMSO. (Prime Minister's Foreword)

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* paragraph 1.3

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* paragraph 1.11

others as required.

This group was formed in 2015 due to an increasing recognition in the nuclear policy sections of the MOD and FCO that the departments had effectively been deterred from engaging with the public at all on nuclear deterrence matters since the Civil Defence Handbook debacle of 1980.<sup>37</sup> The imperative for this change to the *status quo* was the imminent decision to commit to the next stage of the development of the Vanguard Class Successor submarine. This recognition was compounded by an acknowledgement that there was a corresponding lack of understanding of many aspects of British nuclear deterrence policy and programme not only among the public at large, but throughout Whitehall and Westminster; at all levels.

### **An independent nuclear deterrent**

Since the Labour party argued in 1964 that '[Polaris] will not be independent and it will not be British and it will not deter',<sup>38</sup> there has been a perceived lack of independence of the British nuclear deterrent. Greenpeace argue:

'Trident is not a 'UK' weapons system - this is another well-worn myth. Nearly all of the weapon parts are sourced or leased from the US, with few exceptions, such as the warhead, is manufactured in the UK based on the US W76 design. The software, targeting and weather data are all US-sourced.'<sup>39</sup>

and CND suggest that;

'Our nuclear weapon system is neither politically or technically independent. It has been assigned to NATO since the 1960s, meaning Trident could be used against a country attacking – or threatening to attack – one of the alliance's member states.'<sup>40</sup>

This is true, the UK does participate in the collective defence of NATO Allies, and British forces form part of the NATO deterrence and defence posture; this has been the basis of British defence policy since 1949. But the implication that there is a loss of control over the decision to launch a strike is misleading; decision-making is

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<sup>37</sup> SENIOR MOD OFFICIAL Interview with A S Corbett 22 April 2016.

<sup>38</sup> LABOUR PARTY. 1964. *The New Britain* [Online]. Available: <http://labourmanifesto.com/1964/1964-labour-manifesto.shtml> [Accessed 23 Sept 2015].

<sup>39</sup> GREENPEACE. 2006. Trident - the UK's nuclear weapons system [Online]. Greenpeace. Available: <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/peace/trident-the-uks-nuclear-weapons-system> [Accessed 15 July 2016].

<sup>40</sup> CND. 2016b. CND Trident Mythbuster [Online]. [www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org): CND. Available: [http://www.cnduk.org/images/stories/Trident\\_mythbuster\\_2016.pdf](http://www.cnduk.org/images/stories/Trident_mythbuster_2016.pdf) [Accessed 22 November 2016].

a fully sovereign UK function; only the Prime Minister can authorise the use of the UK's nuclear deterrent, NATO can only request it.<sup>41</sup> CND also assert that the system is '...dependent on US technical support. ... The British submarines must also regularly visit Kings Bay [the US Trident operating facility in Georgia, USA] for the maintenance and replacement of these missiles.'<sup>42</sup>

Commons Defence Committee evidence suggests otherwise; '...operationally the system is completely independent of the United States. Any decision to launch missiles is a sovereign decision taken by the UK and does not involve anybody else.'<sup>43</sup> The British reliance on the USA for deep technical support for missiles is true, in the sense that the missiles receive maintenance only in the USA, not while they are embarked on British submarines. They remain embarked for the duration of each operational commission, between 12 and 14 years.<sup>44</sup> Otherwise, and in every operational sense, UK Trident is fully independent. Although official references to the independent nuclear deterrent are almost ubiquitous, dependency is an example of a myth that once created, seems to be difficult to refute.

### **A reluctant nuclear weapons state**

From the very start of its nuclear weapons programme, Britain has been a reluctant nuclear weapon state. Attlee, even as he defined the essence of deterrence, sought a means of inhibiting the use of war as a tool of policy in future, suggesting that; 'All nations must give up their dreams of realising some historic expansion at the expense of their neighbours.'<sup>45</sup> His government recognised only after strenuously seeking some form of international agreement, that the UK '... should itself undertake the production of atomic bombs as a means of self-defence as soon as possible.'<sup>46</sup> This focus on some form of international control of nuclear weapons has been an element of British thinking about nuclear weapons ever since. A similar 'twin' focus has been present throughout the history of British nuclear

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<sup>41</sup> DEFENCE COMMITTEE 2006. The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth report of Session 2005-06. Parliamentary Papers HC 1558, Session 2005-06: Parliament.

<sup>42</sup> CND. 2016b. CND Trident Mythbuster [Online]. [www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org): CND. Available: [http://www.cnduk.org/images/stories/Trident\\_mythbuster\\_2016.pdf](http://www.cnduk.org/images/stories/Trident_mythbuster_2016.pdf) [Accessed 22 November 2016].

<sup>43</sup> HARE, T. 2006. Defence Committee, The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context. Parliamentary Papers; HC 986, Session 2005-06, Ev.35-36: Parliament.

<sup>44</sup> HMS Vengeance conducted her first missile on-load in 2000, offloaded them in 2013 and reloaded in 2016 after her mid-life refit.

<sup>45</sup> ATTLEE, C. The Atomic Bomb: Memorandum by the Prime Minister. GEN 75/1, 28 Aug 1945. TNA CAB 130/3.

<sup>46</sup> CABINET OFFICE GEN 75/10 International Control of Atomic Energy; Report by Officials 29 October 1945. TNA CAB 130/3.

weapons policy, although it has been peripheral to this consideration of historical development of nuclear deterrence policy.

Each of the Defence Reviews since the end of the Cold War has addressed nuclear deterrence in the context of a commitment ‘...to working towards a safer world in which there is no requirement for nuclear weapons...’ and made corresponding assertions about disarmament achievements.<sup>47</sup> These are closely linked to perceptions of minimum deterrence, maintaining the lowest force levels necessary to meet that capability. After the 2006 White Paper, the FCO published ‘Lifting the Nuclear Shadow’; a concise appraisal of the issues surrounding nuclear arms control, cataloguing the aspirations for a nuclear weapons free world. In the foreword, then Foreign Secretary Mr Miliband wrote;

‘These are issues which do not just concern Foreign or Defence policy. They are about the security of our world both now and in the next generation and deserve wider engagement. I therefore asked for the issues to be set out in a way that does not expect the reader to know the subject inside out. ... The path to eliminating all nuclear weapons. To achieve this will require bold thinking and careful work by many nations. The UK is wholeheartedly committed to playing its part in this process.’<sup>48</sup>

‘Lifting the Nuclear Shadow’ included an explanation of International Agreements and what Britain’s role in them is, a consideration of the concept of ‘Global Zero’ (a reduction to no nuclear weapons worldwide) and a consideration of the implications of security without nuclear weapons. It was soon followed by a government-wide document ‘The Road to 2010’<sup>49</sup> which set out the British position in advance of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty conference. Unfortunately, this document was less clear and much of the elegant alignment of deterrence policy and disarmament aspiration described in ‘Lifting the Nuclear Shadow’ was muddled and the message confused or lost. This is the type of incoherent official contribution to public discourse on nuclear deterrence that the Cabinet Office Communications Steering Group should avert.

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<sup>47</sup> UK GOVT 2006. The future of the UK’s strategic nuclear deterrent: the White Paper CM6994. London: HMSO. Section 2 paragraph 2.2

<sup>48</sup> FCO Lifting the Nuclear Shadow: Creating the Conditions for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons (2009). London Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Foreword p4

<sup>49</sup> UK GOVT The Road to 2010 Addressing the nuclear question in the twenty first century CM7675. www.gov.uk: HMSO.

## Factors in the development of British Government policy

### Strategic Imperatives

The rationale that the 'bomber would always get through' was born in the perceived inability to respond effectively to the Zeppelin raids of 1915 and the Gotha raids of 1917. It is the essence of the deterrence argument; Baldwin's famous dictum continued; 'The only defence is offence. You have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves. I just mention that . . . so that people may realize what is waiting for them when the next war comes.'<sup>50</sup>

This was borne out by the reports from Guernica and China. In the First World War, Cabinet had been dealing with a wicked problem; technological change had enabled warfare to evolve to challenge accepted moral standards, but there was a clear demand from an increasingly vociferous lobby to retaliate in kind, and a strategic imperative to combat such tactics. A lack of response might damage already strained morale among the British population, defence against such attacks was limited, but to retaliate was repugnant to many in office. In the event, limited retaliation was conducted, but in the context of an almost apologetic government narrative.

In 1940, Churchill's Cabinet was faced with a similar dilemma; after Dunkirk the only means of offensive action against Germany was to bomb its industrial capabilities, but despite the RAF actively preparing for just such a campaign between 1928 and 1940, the British bombing forces were technologically incapable of mounting a sustainable bombing offensive, and the scant resources were in demand for every other task as well. By 1942; 'Bomber Command provides our only offensive action yet pressed home directly against Germany. All our other efforts are defensive in their nature, and are not intended to do more, and never can do more, than enable us to exist in the face of the enemy.'<sup>51</sup> There is no evidence that suggests that had Britain had the capability to conduct precision bombing and avoid collateral casualties in cities, it would not have done so, although some advisers did advocate it; 'If even half the total load of 10,000 bombers were dropped on the built-up areas of these 58 German towns the great majority of their inhabitants (about one third of the German population) would be turned out of house and home.'<sup>52</sup> The gradual build-up of Bomber Command between 1941 and 1943 enabled the vision of a

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<sup>50</sup> BALDWIN, S. HC Deb 10 November 1932. Hansard vol 270 cc632.

<sup>51</sup> AIR STAFF Bomber Command Report 'Role and Work of Bomber Command' 28 Jun 1942. TNA PREM 3/11/5 (166).

<sup>52</sup> CHERWELL Untitled Minute Cherwell to Churchill 30 Mar 1943. TNA PREM 3/11/4(144).

substantial bombing campaign against German industry, but although the new heavy bombers were capable of delivering substantial payloads, they were very vulnerable to air defences during daylight and their navigation was still not accurate enough to conduct night attacks and achieve the precision bombing which the British government had used as the cornerstone of the moral case for the offensive. Britain therefore made the decision to shift to night bombing, accepting the reduced accuracy in order to achieve lower RAF casualty rates.

The evolution of NATO nuclear strategy during the Cold War was almost entirely driven by the USA. That said, Britain played an important role, particularly during the 1960s, with Healey advocating the graduated deterrence strategy which evolved into NATO's flexible response. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, this further developed into a nuclear warfighting strategy (using nuclear weapons for military effect, not just deterrence) which survived until the INF treaty in 1987 and the demise of the Soviet Union. Since the Cold War, NATO has openly adopted an explicit policy of nuclear deterrence; the 1991 Strategic Concept stated: '... Allies concerned agreed to move away, where appropriate, from the concept of forward defence towards a reduced forward presence, and to modify the principle of flexible response to reflect a reduced reliance on nuclear weapons.'<sup>53</sup> This suggests that NATO still envisaged the use of nuclear weapons for military effect, albeit with reduced reliance on them. In 2010 this evolved into; 'Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy.'<sup>54</sup> Whilst this may appear semantic, the change in terminology, with deterrence elevated before defence, represented a significant step for NATO. The Warsaw Summit of 2016 saw intense negotiation on the 'nuclear language' to be included; evolving to a more robust, but non-confrontational, statement of resolve,<sup>55</sup>

'The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression. Nuclear weapons are unique. Any employment of nuclear weapons against NATO would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict.'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> NATO. 1991. The Alliance's New Strategic Concept [Online]. Brussels, Belgium: NATO. Available: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm) [Accessed 13 September 2016].

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> The author was closely involved in the drafting, and subsequent negotiation, of this text.

<sup>56</sup> NATO. 2016. *Warsaw Summit Communiqué* [Online]. Brussels, Belgium: NATO. Available: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm?selectedLocale=en) [Accessed 13 September 2016]. Para 54



This text implies that Alliance nuclear weapons remain for deterrence purposes, and the communique treads a fine line between resolve and restraint.

### **Industrial Capacity**

This research has found no historical evidence that suggests that industrial or technical capacity in itself is a factor in the decision to become or remain a nuclear power. Arguably this might be related to 'prestige' and that is considered below. Advances in high-technology industrial capacity is acknowledged as a valuable side-product of nuclear related work, but not as the motive for it. In the Trident decision of 1980 and the recent Successor debate, industrial capacity and the limited facilities to construct nuclear submarines have been noted as limitations on decision making and timelines; '...greater industrial collaboration and affordability are essential components in any new submarine programme and that it needs to address its own shortage of skills in managing a programme of the scale of a Vanguard successor.'<sup>57</sup> The BASIC Trident Commission concluded; 'Industrial and economic impacts are important for the communities concerned, but cannot play a key role in determining whether the UK continues to deploy a nuclear deterrent.'<sup>58</sup>

### **Cost – a technical factor?**

In the early days of the atomic programme, British national strategy had been simple – atomic bombs dropped from heavy bombers would act as a deterrent. Budget restrictions meant, however, that the bomb technology would not be paired with a suitable bomber until 1957, by which time, the atomic bomb was perceived as obsolete in the face of the hydrogen bomb, and the heavy bomber, free-fall bomb combination was obsolescent in the face of developing missile technology. The pace of technological change and perceived associated strategic imperatives drove the UK into the position where Britain could no longer afford to develop a sovereign nuclear capability; and as described above, purchased the Polaris system from the USA.

Similar combinations of budget and technical strategic imperatives have dominated British national system choices ever since, in particular the decision to purchase Trident. Trident D5 was acknowledged to be more precise and capable than the minimum deterrent required by Britain, but in terms of cost and 'future-proofing' it

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<sup>57</sup> HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE 2007. Ninth Report of Session 2006–07: The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the White Paper. London: House of Commons.

<sup>58</sup> BASIC 2014. Trident Commission Concluding Report; An independent, cross-party inquiry to examine UK nuclear weapons policy. London: British American Security Information Council, Trident Commission. P6

would have been ludicrous to reject it in favour of a less capable system that would have been more expensive. In one sense, a similar situation pertains in 2016. Simply as a technical planning factor, cost suggests that the cheapest option available to sustain the current level of deterrence capability is to replace the submarines carrying Trident. The supporting work for the 2006 White Paper included a very substantial study which considered over 100 different combinations of theoretical and existing weapons and delivery systems. This study considered technical risk, cost and effectiveness; including scale (minimum destructive capability), independence, range, invulnerability and readiness. These options were narrowed down to four generic options; long range aircraft equipped with cruise missiles; surface ships equipped with Trident missiles; a land-based (silo) system equipped with Trident missiles and; submarines equipped with Trident missiles.<sup>59</sup> The political decision to proceed with the Successor Project was the result of that choice.

Cost can also, obviously, be used as a tool of political argument. Much of the anti-nuclear opposition of the 1950s and 1960s was against the possession of nuclear weapons in the first place; a moral position. In the 1980 decision on Trident, this remained an element but the nature of the opposition was coloured by the NATO long range tactical nuclear forces decision of December 1979, the siting of cruise missiles in the UK and an increased public perception of the immanence of the threat of nuclear war. There was opposition to the decision to replace Polaris with Trident on cost grounds, but it was not a pre-eminent aspect of the anti-nuclear platform. Since 2006, however, there has been sustained and coherent criticism of the 'Successor submarine' decision on cost grounds. For example, CND maintains that the costs will be '... at least £205 billion. This money would be enough to improve the NHS by building 120 state of the art hospitals and employing 150,000 new nurses ...'<sup>60</sup> CND does not make clear that the headline figure is calculated taking into account the entire capital, through-life running and disposal costs into the 2060s.<sup>61</sup> The government publishes costs in terms of the way it budgets which, in this case, is for the capital cost of the Successor project; '... as set in the 2015 SDSR we estimate that 4 new Dreadnought submarines will cost £31 billion to build,

<sup>59</sup> UK GOVT 2006. The future of the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent: the White Paper CM6994. London: HMSO. Chapter 4 and Annex B.

<sup>60</sup> CND. 2016c. No to Trident [Online]. London: CND. Available: <http://www.cnduk.org/campaigns/no-to-trident> [Accessed 22 November 2016].

<sup>61</sup> £205 Bn over 45 years compares with an annual NHS budget for 2016/17 of £120.611bn: NHS. 2016. Key Statistics on the NHS [Online]. NHS Confederation. Available: <http://www.nhsconfed.org/resources/key-statistics-on-the-nhs> [Accessed 22 November 2016].

test and commission, spread over 35 years, with a contingency of £10 billion. On average, that amounts to 0.2% per year of government spending.<sup>62</sup> Officials and government politicians tend not to share platforms with CND lobbyists, so these figures are seldom tested like for like.

Cost becomes a factor only if the principle of possession of nuclear weapons is accepted. If it is, then a cost benefits analysis of various systems is entirely pertinent and an appropriate function of parliamentary debate and oversight. It is notable that the public focus of anti-nuclear opposition has moved away from the principled opposition to nuclear weapons of the 1958 CND Policy Statement,<sup>63</sup> which has had limited public resonance despite the 1960 and 1980 peaks, to arguments about costs. CND also asserts that; 'Former Prime Minister Tony Blair, one of the biggest supporters of replacing Trident in 2007, has admitted that the only purpose of maintaining the nuclear weapons system is to give Britain status.'<sup>64</sup>

### **Prestige**

One of the most invidious criticisms of British nuclear deterrence is that it is a virility symbol; a sop to politicians' vanity. Healey said of Macmillan's government '...they clutched at the nuclear missile as a virility symbol to compensate for the exposure of their military impotence at Suez...'<sup>65</sup> and Joan Ruddock asserted '... the Government are committed to a massively expensive useless virility symbol called Trident.'<sup>66</sup> The virility critique is a corruption of the suggestion that nuclear weapons give a state a unique status, or prestige. This is a perpetual, but discretely acknowledged factor. Macmillan briefed his Cabinet in July 1954; 'unless we possessed thermo-nuclear weapons, we should lose out influence and standing in world affairs.'<sup>67</sup> Ironically, Healey subsequently noted 'a few Polaris submarines would be worth more than the same number of hunter-killers, both because they would give Britain more influence, particularly in Washington.'<sup>68</sup> Alec Douglas Home said when interviewed by Robin Day; '... I do believe that if we deprive ourselves of all control over our nuclear arm then Britain becomes a second-class Power.'<sup>69</sup> This different interpretation of virility was prevalent at all levels; the

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<sup>62</sup> 2016. UK nuclear deterrence: what you need to know. *In*: MOD (ed.). London: MOD.

<sup>63</sup> DONNELLY, S. 2008. CND: The Story of a Peace Movement. *History Today*, 58.

<sup>64</sup> CND. 2016c. No to Trident [Online]. London: CND. Available: <http://www.cnduk.org/campaigns/no-to-trident> [Accessed 22 November 2016].

<sup>65</sup> HEALEY, D. 1989. *The Time of My Life*, London, Michael Joseph. P242

<sup>66</sup> HC Debate 28 October 1987 Defence Second Day's Debate. HANSARD vol 121 cc309-402 309.

<sup>67</sup> CABINET OFFICE Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet 8 Jul 54. TNA CAB 128/27/48.

<sup>68</sup> HEALEY, D. 1989. *The Time of My Life*, London, Michael Joseph. P302

<sup>69</sup> DAY, R. 1993. ... But With Respect, London, Widenfield and Nicolson. p41

Chiefs of Staff advised Macmillan's Defence Policy Committee; 'To that end we must strengthen our position and influence as a world Power and maintain and consolidate our alliance with the United States.'<sup>70</sup> One of the unanswered questions raised by Armstrong to Mrs Thatcher's cabinet was; 'Given the decline in our world position in other respects, will it do us enough good to stay in the league from the 1990s to justify the cost of the burden...?'<sup>71</sup>

The situation pertains today. As the Shadow Chancellor;

'Ed Balls argued at the Trident Alternatives; it is nothing to do with defence, at the end of the day it is the argument that nobody can use in public, that if you opt out of the nuclear club then you opt out of senior rank in the World. It's the price tag, otherwise the French have it, the only European nuclear power, the Americans will feel betrayed and therefore you just relegate us...'<sup>72</sup>

While there is no evidence that nuclear weapon status is related to permanent UN Security Council membership, the Times concluded in 2009 that;

'Trident and its successor are as much about national power and Britain's position in the world as about military effect. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the US, Russia, China, Britain and France) achieved their positions by being the victors of the Second World War. But they now retain those seats only thanks to their possession of credible nuclear deterrents. It's not about GDP, hospitals, improvements in child poverty or school league tables: abandon the deterrent and, sooner or later, Britain loses its seat.'<sup>73</sup>

The issue of prestige is not simple, nor is it superficial; Liam Fox argued; '...a global role for the UK is a necessity, not a luxury'. This accords closely with the view of this government, that Britain must help shape a changing world, rather than merely react to it.'<sup>74</sup> The 2010 SDSR stated;

'The National Security Strategy sets out two clear objectives: (i) to ensure a secure and resilient UK by protecting our people, economy, infrastructure, territory and ways of life from all major risks that can affect us directly; and (ii) to shape a stable world, by acting

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<sup>70</sup> CABINET OFFICE Cabinet Report by the Committee on Defence Policy 27 July 1954. TNA CAB 129-69-0050.

<sup>71</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A0547 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent' dated 2 Nov 79. TNA PREM 19/14. Paragraph 6

<sup>72</sup> LORD ROBERTSON Interview with A Corbett 12 November 2014.

<sup>73</sup> TIMES. Without Trident, the second division awaits: Britain's nuclear deterrent is an easy target for cuts. But the real cost has been exaggerated. 22 June 2009, p.24.

<sup>74</sup> FOX, L. 2010. Deterrence in the 21st Century: Speech at Chatham House 13 July 2010. [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk): HMSO.

to reduce the likelihood of risks affecting the UK or our interests overseas, and applying our instruments of power and influence to shape the global environment and tackle potential risks at source.’<sup>75</sup>

This is sustained in SDSR 2015 where Britain; ‘... plays a strong, positive global role. We project our power, influence and values to help shape a secure, prosperous future for the UK and to build wider security, stability and prosperity. We have unique strengths that enable us to do this.’<sup>76</sup> If Britain wants to shape a changing World, rather than merely react to the changes, then a seat at the top table, or prestige, is an invaluable and irreplaceable asset in the national ‘toolbox’. There is no evidence that there is a correlation between a state possessing nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, but a number of senior politicians, including some who ridiculed the idea previously, believe that ‘prestige’ is related to the nuclear deterrent and believe it merits consideration in its retention.

### **Civil defence**

Civil defence has not really been considered as a genuine factor in nuclear deterrence strategy since the debacle of the early 1980s. The derision to which the publication of the Protect and Survive pamphlet exposed the concept was sufficient to ensure the end of the civil defence project. To a certain extent, this process had been ongoing since the mid 1950s when the Strath report highlighted the inability to provide any credible defence against nuclear weapons, except for a select few in deep underground facilities. The choice between preparation to fight a nuclear war, and investment in deterring it was really made in 1955 and tacitly made public in the Sandys Defence Review of 1957. The War Game was an unwitting step in the process, ridiculing the Civil Defence Organisation claims that nuclear war would be survivable. It stemmed from the recognition that deterrence was more credible than defence, but that this would be difficult to present in public, as the Cabinet Office recorded in 1954:

‘These and other changes recommended in this report certainly could not be defended in isolation. Public acceptance of them can only be secured if they are presented as parts of a coherent plan based on the recognition that no purely defensive policy could ensure the safety of these islands and those who live in them and that the main weight of

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<sup>75</sup> UK GOVT Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: CM7948. London: HMSO. P9 paragraph 1.4

<sup>76</sup> UK GOVT National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom. CM 9161. London: HMSO. P13 paragraph 2.1

our defence effort must now be concentrated on building up the deterrent strength which will prevent the outbreak of a major war.<sup>77</sup>

Despite officials' advice, the contents of the Strath Report and their ramifications remained closely guarded secrets in Whitehall and went no further to avoid the need for awkward explanations of meaningless shelter and evacuation policies.<sup>78</sup> The publication of the Civil Defence handbook by the Home Office in 1980 was an own goal of epic proportions.<sup>79</sup> Survival of a nuclear war provided plot lines for much of the fiction produced at the time and civil defence was a staple for comedy such as *Yes Prime Minister*. The irony is that when given the opportunity to engage in informed debate after seeing 'The Day After', American audiences proved to be rational and well-informed, and not radicalised to one extreme or another.<sup>80</sup> This suggests that the public should be trusted with the truth and enabled by government to make an informed opinion.

### **Moral views**

The tension between the ability of modern warfare to bypass traditional concepts of battlefields, combatants and non-combatants and the ethical implications of doing so has been at the centre of British strategic thinking since 1915, both in public and in Parliament. 'The invention of the bombing plane abolished chivalry for ever. It is now 'retaliate or go under.'<sup>81</sup> In 1915-18, there was no evidence that it was 'retaliate or go under', but there was a determined minority that advocated retaliation for what was commonly perceived to be the 'haphazard murder'<sup>82</sup> of aerial bombardment by German aircraft. There was a similarly vociferous lobby that advocated a strongly deontological position; 'Does the Government think that, if we send aeroplanes to kill little innocent German babies, that is going to help the situation?'<sup>83</sup> Neither side really engaged much with the other, and the government, which was trying to sustain a war the like of which had never been seen before, was caught in the middle of two mutually exclusive positions.

During the interwar years, although states unsuccessfully sought to outlaw aerial bombardment, the embryonic Royal Air Force adopted the doctrine as its *raison*

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<sup>77</sup> CABINET OFFICE Cabinet Report by the Committee on Defence Policy 27 July 1954. TNA CAB 129-69-0050. paragraph 19

<sup>78</sup> CABINET OFFICE Unreferenced memorandum Monckton (Cabinet Office) Chilvers (MOD) 11 Jun 56. TNA CAB 21-4054.

<sup>79</sup> KENT, B. 1999. Protest and Survive. *History Today*, 49, 14-16.

<sup>80</sup> OVERPECK, D. 2012. 'Remember! it's Only a Movie!' Expectations and Receptions of *The Day After* (1983). *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 32, 267-292.

<sup>81</sup> DAILY MIRROR. Bombs on Berlin. 12 Sept 1940. p5

<sup>82</sup> GUARDIAN. Zeppelin Commander on his Task. 25 Sep 1915, p.6.

<sup>83</sup> Sir S Collins MP in HC Debate 18 June 1917. HANSARD vol 94 cc1419-21.

*d'être*, but this doctrinal focus was not successfully converted into capability. The debate at the Chiefs of Staff meeting in 1928 is instructive for the continuity of issues associated with strategic bombing and (ultimately) nuclear deterrence. Trenchard argued that while it was immoral to bomb cities purely in order to terrorise the civilian population, bombing which interrupted manufacture, transportation etc, which also terrorised the civilian population, was legitimate.<sup>84</sup> During the Second World War this was the strategy ostensibly followed by the RAF, although casualty rates during daylight raids forced a shift to less accurate night bombing. The USAAF in the same period, faced with similar factors, chose to continue with day time bombing, and developed additional protection for the bombers. The issue here, of course, was the balance between casualty rates amongst aircrew and the desire to minimise civilian casualties.

There were thus serious tensions between the leadership of Bomber Command, the senior leadership of the RAF, and the Cabinet over the public presentation of the activities of Bomber Command; 'Any public protest, whether reasonable or unreasonable, against the bomber offensive could not but hamper the Government in the execution of this policy and might affect the morale of the aircrews themselves.'<sup>85</sup> Modern analysts of the strategic bombing campaign tend to describe the moral thinking that enabled it as the 'supreme emergency' idea; 'what we fight for is of such ultimate importance that we have to break some of our own rules to defend it.'<sup>86</sup> This does not sit well with modern rights-based ethics which admit of no such violation.

Although there may be elements of the nuclear briefing provided to senior Ministers which deal with the ethical questions, I have found no official evidence of formal ethical consideration of the nuclear deterrence mission, although Macmillan's account of Churchill brooding a good deal about the atomic and hydrogen bomb<sup>87</sup> does indicate that individuals did genuinely agonise over these issues. Nothing was provided to SSBN Cos between 2003 and 2009.<sup>88</sup> The supreme emergency logic is certainly one to which many involved in the nuclear deterrent mission would

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<sup>84</sup> TRENCHARD, H. Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff for the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the War Object of an Air Force 2nd May 1928. Reproduced in "Webster and Frankland (1961) The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol IV, London, HMSO" pp71-76.

<sup>85</sup> AIR 14/843, Letter Street to Harris dated 15 December 1943 Quoted in GRAY, P. 2010. The Gloves will Have to Come Off; a Reappraisal of the Legitimacy of the RAF Bomber Offensive against Germany. Air Power Review, 13, 9-40.

<sup>86</sup> SLIM, H. 2007. Killing Civilians; Method, Madness and Morality in War, London, Hurst. p152

<sup>87</sup> MACMILLAN, H. & CATTERALL, P. 2012. The Macmillan Diaries; The Cabinet Years 1950-1957, London, Pan. P297

<sup>88</sup> Author's personal experience

subscribe, supported by the less well articulated feeling that deterrence of war by those with dirty hands imposes peace, which is a desirable moral good in itself.

Fitch, writing in 1940, supposed that; 'For if history means anything, then Jesus developed his thought by criticizing traditional materials in the light of the challenge of new circumstances. This is apparent everywhere ....'<sup>89</sup> This argument to adapt traditional moral thinking to prevailing circumstances seems to undermine the basis and character of any kind of moral certainty, and reflects Johnson's view on the Just War Tradition. But, Fitch continued;

'Doubtless, in a world of fixed structure and pattern we should find certainty in a body of fixed moral principles; but in a world that is characterized by growth, plasticity, and emergence such a set of principles can lead only to chaos and confusion.'<sup>90</sup>

The tendency of modern ethical study to seek fixed normative prescriptions in a rapidly evolving social and international environment seems to seek these fixed moral principles which, in Fitch's view, are largely illusory and of limited utility to practitioners.

Much more useful, even to a non-Christian, is Butterfield's 1951 analysis of Augustine; 'Love God and do what you like.'<sup>91</sup> This would not support pithy public debate; a moral framework of this sort is not conducive to simplification, but it would enable detailed consideration of the factors in play at the moment of decision in highly complex situations without having to reduce it to public soundbites such as 'Does the Government think that, if we send aeroplanes to kill little innocent German babies, that is going to help the situation?'<sup>92</sup> Such a framework could be construed as a miscreants' charter, but if the essential morality of the decision-makers is accepted, and their decisions are tested in specialist environments, it provides a better test for practical ethics than the current arrangement where engagement is avoided altogether.<sup>93</sup> Ethicists and practitioners need never agree, but the conversation is critical and, at present, seems to be missing.

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<sup>89</sup> FITCH, R. E. 1940. An Experimental Christian Ethics. *The Journal of Religion*, 20, 325-339. P329

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p336

<sup>91</sup> BUTTERFIELD, H. 1951. *History and Human Relations*, London, Collins.

<sup>92</sup> Sir S Collins; HC Debate 18 June 1917. HANSARD vol 94 cc1419-21. Col 1420

<sup>93</sup> This idea bears some similarity to Baylis's 'permanent dialogue'; BAYLIS, J. 2002. *Nuclear Ethics, Realism and Utopianism: the 'permanent dialogue' revisited*. Swansea: University of Wales.



## Experts and the public debate

The Warnock Inquiry at Chapter 7 was a successful experiment in the use of 'experts' to inform both government and public in an ethically challenging area of technological progress. This inquiry model is unlikely to be successful in the public analysis of defence policy because of the security considerations; even if the experts were exposed to the classified material, their report could be no more classified than official public engagement. Recent examples of official inquiries could include the Chilcot Inquiry into the 2003 Gulf War which was commissioned in 2009 and reported in 2016 and the Saville Inquiry into the 1972 'Bloody Sunday' which was commissioned in 1998 and reported in 2010. Such timescales are not conducive to policy formulation, and the public reports which contained previously classified documents (albeit redacted) would not be possible for information that would remain classified during and after the inquiry.

Nott's reluctance to include a second minister in the Trident debate in 1981 is striking; he did not believe that two ministers could 'master the brief'.<sup>94</sup> Mrs Thatcher did not agree. Given that the core (if not the whole) of British Defence Policy in 1980 was the maintenance of the security of the NATO alliance through deterrence of the USSR, it is surprising to note the degree of ignorance of the key aspects of the deterrent which Nott seemed prepared to accept, from the very ministers expected to oversee it. The current provision of nuclear deterrence training for military officials is negligible. There is one half day session allocated to the (year-long) Defence Academy 'Advanced Command and Staff Course' (ACSC) and no specific policy training provided for those involved in the mission.<sup>95</sup> Those joining departments of state which deal with the nuclear deterrent are expected to pick it up in post. In contrast, CND offer a series of educational packages for schools aligned with the National Curriculum for various subjects including 'Drama, English, Citizenship, Religious Education, Maths, ICT, Computer Science, Art & Design, Government and Politics, Social Sciences, History'.<sup>96</sup> Such educational facilities are not available from official sources.

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<sup>94</sup> MOD Personal memorandum Nott (MOD) to Prime Minister MO18/1/1 'Trident, Public Attitudes' dated 2 Feb 81. TNA PREM 19/555.

<sup>95</sup> Author's personal experience; ACSC 1999-2000, SSBN Command 2003-2007, MOD 2009-2011

<sup>96</sup> CND. 2016a. CND Free Teaching Resources [Online]. CND. Available: <http://www.cnduk.org/information/peace-education/teaching-resources> [Accessed 22 November 2016].

A further challenge is one highlighted by Warnock; there is no such thing as a moral expert.<sup>97</sup> While the public may defer to doctors, engineers, or airline pilots etc as experts, where their expertise is technical, there appears to be a much less deferential attitude to moral issues where the acknowledged technical expertise challenges intuitively-held moral convictions. Engagement on moral issues is therefore more important.

‘Insofar as possible, it is wise to simplify language rather than content – that is, take the extra words to make hard ideas clear. Unfortunately, neither the expert source nor the lay audience is usually willing to dedicate the time needed to convey complex information a step at a time.’<sup>98</sup>

Sandman was writing about public perceptions of risk, but the principle holds for emerging technologies, such as nuclear weapons. The onus is on the experts to make their expertise accessible. At present, they struggle and the situation is exacerbated because the majority of the public, and decision-makers, receive information filtered through the mass media.

The 1998 Strategic Defence Review deliberately drew on extensive public consultation. The review was programmed to take twelve months; in the event it took eighteen. Lord Robertson subsequently noted;

‘we would invite everyone, the CNDers, the unions, journalists, academics. ... we wanted to be as open and inclusive as possible, both because it was a good thing to do and partly because I thought ‘I want people at the end of the day to say it’s our review’ and I joke now and say that I had always said that if the SDR was successful, it would be called the SDR and if it was a failure it would be called the Robertson review.’<sup>99</sup>

This inclusive engagement was reflected in the Commons Defence Committee which had eleven sessions of evidence on the SDR in the two weeks after publication, working hard to ‘... attain the knowledge required to create a convincing critique ...’<sup>100</sup> Nuclear deterrence had actually been ring-fenced and

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<sup>97</sup> WARNOCK, M. 1985. Moral Thinking and Government Policy: The Warnock Committee on Human Embryology. *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly; Health and Society*, 63, 19. P513

<sup>98</sup> SANDMAN, P. 1987a. Explaining Risk to Non-Experts: A Communications Challenge. *Emergency Preparedness Digest*, 1987, 25-29.

<sup>99</sup> LORD ROBERTSON Interview with A Corbett 12 November 2014.

<sup>100</sup> GEORGE, B. 1998. Political Perspectives on the Outcome of SDR: The House of Commons Select Committee Report. *The RUSI Journal*, 143, 26. P26

separate from the SDR, although decisions on the scale of the deterrent were taken.<sup>101</sup>

Scrutiny of government policy decisions should be conducted by Parliament, and the Commons Defence Committee has a distinguished tradition of holding government to account on many matters. However, it takes evidence in an unclassified environment and publishes unclassified reports, so the same security inhibitions apply. Moreover, on nuclear deterrence issues, the government of the day has regularly circumvented or inhibited the Commons in their ability to do even this level of scrutiny. The Defence Committee outrage at the government announcement of the decision to purchase Trident in July 1980, seven months before the publication of the Committee report is illustrative; 'Since the House has voted, by 316 votes to 248, to endorse the choice of the Trident system, it is not for us to challenge the principle of that decision.'<sup>102</sup> The House of Commons Defence Committee was placed in a similar position in December 2006 when the government published the White Paper and announced the Parliamentary debate would be held in March 2007.

This left the Defence Committee three months to complete a report to inform the debate, and constrained them in their ability to express an opinion since to do so beforehand would be to pre-empt the prerogatives of Parliament; 'We do not express a view on the merits of retaining and renewing the UK's nuclear deterrent. Endorsing or rejecting the Government's proposals will be for the House of Commons, as a whole, to decide.'<sup>103</sup> Notwithstanding the limitations imposed on it by the government programme, the Defence Committee's report concluded; 'The Government deserves to be commended for exposing its proposal to renew the strategic nuclear deterrent to public debate and decision in Parliament, which previous Governments have not done.'<sup>104</sup> The report considered; the timing of decisions, the scale of the UK nuclear deterrent, nuclear deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, legal and treaty obligations and; deterrent options and costs. Specifically, it did not consider whether the UK should remain a nuclear weapon state. The Defence Committee reported that it remained unclear how the Government determined what constituted a minimum nuclear deterrent and advocated more

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<sup>101</sup> UK GOVT 1998. Strategic Defence Review. London: TSO. Supporting paper 5 paragraphs 6-9

<sup>102</sup> DEFENCE COMMITTEE 1981b. Fourth Report from the Defence Committee Session 1980-81. London: HMSO. Paragraph 1

<sup>103</sup> HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE 2007. Ninth Report of Session 2006-07: The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the White Paper. London: House of Commons. Paragraph 3

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. paragraph 186

clarity on what constitutes UK vital interests so as not to lead to a lowering of the nuclear threshold.<sup>105</sup>

The Debate on the White Paper in March 2007 divided in favour of the government motion 'to take the steps necessary to maintain the UK's minimum strategic nuclear deterrent beyond the life of the existing system and to take further steps towards meeting the UK's disarmament responsibilities under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.'<sup>106</sup> The Deputy Leader of the House (Nigel Griffiths) resigned from the government in protest, followed swiftly by three other junior Labour ministers. One major topic of debate was the nature of the decision to which the motion committed the House, and whether it could expect a further substantive vote at a later stage of the procurement process. The debate was also notable for the (Labour) Foreign Secretary's response to the intervention of Labour MP and CND member Mr Corbyn which, she said, was '... complete and utter rubbish...'<sup>107</sup> In turn, Mrs Beckett was castigated by Mr Hague (Shadow Foreign Secretary) for her own, more pliable convictions:

'It was all the more powerful coming from her, in a way, because she was a long-standing member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament ... The fact that someone with her long-held views has reached the clear conclusion—in Government, and with all the information available to her—that the British nuclear deterrent must be retained, updated and replaced is in itself an indication of the powerful case for doing so.'<sup>108</sup>

All in all, this debate was an example of British Parliamentary politics at its worst with the serious issues in the debate virtually swamped by procedural distraction, party points-scoring and personal attacks.

The press reports were mostly similarly trivial; the Daily Express commented on the implications of the vote for the Labour leadership; 'Surely it is a serious indictment of Mr Blair's leadership that Labour cannot muster a parliamentary majority on a matter as crucial as defence.'<sup>109</sup> The Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror revelled in the government's need to rely on the Conservative opposition to carry

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. paragraphs 64 and 81

<sup>106</sup> HC Debate 14 March 2007 Trident. House of Commons debates Parliamentary Business home page: Houses of Parliament.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Col 305

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. col 310

<sup>109</sup> DAILY EXPRESS. Can our defence ever be safe in Labour hands? , 15 March 2007, p.10.

the vote<sup>110</sup> and the Scotsman insisted that the argument was not over.<sup>111</sup> The Independent protested that 'The voters have good reason to feel let down' and commented;

'The renewal of Trident... is an issue of paramount national significance that cried out for a thorough debate. Instead, a succession of mostly lacklustre speeches preceded a vote that the Government was never going to lose. The voters, and taxpayers, have good reason to feel let down. Mr Blair's suggestion that a future Parliament may decide about contracts for the new submarines was neither here nor there. Mr Hague was correct when he said that the decision taken yesterday was the decision.

.... It is regrettable that neither the Government nor David Cameron's new Conservatives could suggest anything more original than an expensive renewal of the current arrangements. Regrettable, too, that the Liberal Democrats, so staunch in opposing the Iraq war, asked for nothing more than more time to make up their minds. A unique chance for new thinking has been lost.'<sup>112</sup>

Such a considered and balanced contribution towards a genuinely informed debate was notable by exception.

Since the May 2011 'Initial Gate', the MOD has published an annual 'Update to Parliament' on the Successor Programme. These are in the form of Command Documents which do not require agreement or legislation. Whilst these documents are political in purpose, they are expected to conform to Parliamentary standards for rigour and accuracy and are, therefore, valuable contributions to the available authoritative information necessary to inform a public debate. The Commons Defence Committee report 'Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century'<sup>113</sup> was a very wide-ranging report on the National Security Strategy and the tiers of threat that document assessed. It was more about the use of the concept of deterrence based on conventional forces against asymmetric and terrorist threats than in the use of nuclear deterrence against state threats.

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<sup>110</sup> DAILY MAIL. The great rebellion ; 95 Labour MPs join revolt but Tory votes rescue Blair. 15 March 2007, p.4. and DAILY MIRROR. 95 REBELS ; Blair humiliated as he's forced to rely on the Tories to win nuclear missiles battle. 15 March 2007, p.6.

<sup>111</sup> SCOTSMAN. Trident argument is not over. 15 March 2007, p.29.

<sup>112</sup> INDEPENDENT. The voters have good reason to feel let down. 15 March 2007, p.40.

<sup>113</sup> HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE 2013. Eleventh Report of Session 2013: Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century vol 1. London: House of Commons.

## Expertise in public

The expert analysis and debate of British nuclear deterrence policy in public therefore falls to non-official bodies. This is not unusual in any policy environment, but in the case of British nuclear weapons policy, there is a conspicuous absence of government participation.

The 2005 Royal United Services Institute conference 'The Future of Strategic Deterrence for the UK'<sup>114</sup> included participation from the leading academics in the field of nuclear strategy and security studies, and input from the French Foundation for Strategic Research, but no military or government participation. In 2006, the Oxford Research Group, in collaboration with the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, the British American Security Information Council and the WMD awareness Programme, formed a new initiative, 'Beyond Trident' to;

'conduct new and in-depth research, foster debate in Parliament and among stakeholders, raise public awareness at all levels and create pressure for a high level non-partisan investigation and inquiry into UK nuclear weapons policy in the context of actual security needs and objectives.'<sup>115</sup>

Its report, published in 2006, is a balanced debate which picks up on many of the key aspects of a contemporary discussion of the British nuclear deterrent, sadly lacking in the official and parliamentary environment, with input in the form of debates by eminent academics and specialists, including serving politicians and retired officials and officers. The result was a valuable contribution to the public debate, bereft of official input.

The significant exception to the lack of government participation in a public debate was the 2007 RUSI Debate; 'Renewing Britain's Independent Strategic Nuclear Deterrent'<sup>116</sup> which saw Defence Secretary Des Browne share a platform with three expert academic commentators. The debate ranged over the rationale for retention of an independent nuclear deterrent. On 'prestige', or status, Lord Browne argued that; 'I would never advocate that we do this for reasons of status .... We don't rely, for our position and our status and our relationships internationally, on the fact that we are a nuclear weapons state...' Why decide now was a significant factor. The

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<sup>114</sup> RUSI 2005. The Future of the UK Strategic Deterrent. RUSI London: RUSI.

<sup>115</sup> BOOTH, K. & BARNABY, F. 2006. The Future of Britain's Nuclear Weapons: Experts reframe the debate. In: OXFORD RESEARCH GROUP (ed.). Oxford: Oxford Research Group.

<sup>116</sup> WILLET, L. 2007. Renewing Britain's Independent Strategic Nuclear Deterrent; A Debate [Online]. RUSI RUSI. Available: <https://rusi.org/commentary/renewing-britain's-independent-strategic-nuclear-deterrent-debate> [Accessed 20 November 2016].

debate also considered non-proliferation, legal challenges, industrial challenges, the maintenance of continuous at sea deterrence, a need for genuine initiatives to create the conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons and consideration of Britain's contribution to NATO. On cost, the government figures were accepted, and the focus was on the opportunity cost of those sums, but since then, cost has become a highly contentious aspect of the Successor Project.

In February 2011 the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) established the Trident Commission, an independent cross-party inquiry to examine UK nuclear weapons policy. BASIC is a small think tank consisting mostly of very senior ex-officials and politicians, supported by experienced academics, with '...one very large idea: ... a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons.'<sup>117</sup> The Commission consisted of two previous Secretaries of State for Defence, an ex-Chief of Defence Staff, a retired UK ambassador to the UN and four eminent academic experts, including two peers.

The BASIC commission was supported on an off the record basis by the Cabinet Office, FCO and MOD to ensure that the government policy was explained fully, within the classification limits of the Commission's remit. The report, published in July 2014, addressed three critical questions under a national security framework:

'Should the United Kingdom continue to be a nuclear weapons state?

If so, is Trident the only or best option for delivering the deterrent?

What more can and should the United Kingdom do to facilitate faster progress on global nuclear disarmament?'<sup>118</sup>

The final report was a dense read and (in an echo of the Cabinet Office quip about the 'Daily Mail' version of the 'Daily Telegraph' version of the 1980 Open Government Document),<sup>119</sup> BASIC produced a 2 page precis of the 'headline commission messages' to accompany it. The report, unlike official publications, attempts to deal with the critical question in Armstrong's memo to Mrs Thatcher from 1979; what is the nuclear deterrent for?<sup>120</sup> In addressing that question, the report considered the historical legacy as it affected the present day and

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<sup>117</sup> BASIC 2014. Trident Commission Concluding Report; An independent, cross-party inquiry to examine UK nuclear weapons policy. London: British American Security Information Council, Trident Commission. pIV

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. P3

<sup>119</sup> MOD Unreferenced memorandum Norbury (PUS at MOD) to Whitmore (Cabinet Office) MO18/1/1 Polaris Successor dated 23 June 1980. TNA PREM 19/417.

<sup>120</sup> CABINET OFFICE Memorandum Armstrong (Cabinet Secretary) to Prime Minister) A0547 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent' dated 2 Nov 79. TNA PREM 19/14.

considered the pertinent threats. It considered three scenarios that would justify retention of the strategic nuclear deterrent credible; re-emergence of a state with a significant nuclear arsenal and conventional capabilities (Russia); an existing or emerging nuclear state that enters into strategic competition with the UK and; emergence of a future massive overwhelming threat involving bio-weapons or other comparable mass destruction technologies still unknown in which a state might consider the explicit use or threat of use against the UK. The key conclusion of the Trident Commission was;

‘Based upon the two key specific considerations, namely national security concerns and responsibility towards the Alliance, the Commission has come to the unanimous conclusion that the UK should retain and deploy a nuclear arsenal, with a number of caveats expressed below. Most notably, it remains crucial that the UK show keen regard for its position within the international community and for the shared responsibility to achieve progress in global nuclear disarmament.’<sup>121</sup>

Of note is that the Commission did not see this as the final word in the debate, but merely looked to focus the debate on the weighty national security questions they believed should frame the political debate. Public discourse tends to consist of debate conducted in the absence of official participation based on parameters and questions identified by those hostile to the government position. As detailed above, since the 2006 White Paper, the government has been very proactive in the provision of information to Parliament and the public. The 2006 White paper itself derived a great deal from the 1980 Open Government Document; the Parliamentary report into the 2011 Initial Gate is similarly informative on technical factors, and the annual reports to Parliament continue this trend. In addition, direct provision of policy information to the public such as the 2016 MOD Policy Paper ‘UK nuclear deterrence; what you need to know’<sup>122</sup> has been greatly improved, and the Parliamentary Library briefing paper ‘Replacing the UKs ‘Trident’ Nuclear Deterrent’<sup>123</sup> is a very approachable description of the policy decisions and context. Although a Parliamentary, rather than government document, the library briefing paper describes both policy and challenging views, without drawing conclusions. It appears that current government provision of details on nuclear deterrence policy is

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<sup>121</sup> BASIC 2014. Trident Commission Concluding Report; An independent, cross-party inquiry to examine UK nuclear weapons policy. London: British American Security Information Council, Trident Commission.

<sup>122</sup> 2016. UK nuclear deterrence: what you need to know. In: MOD (ed.). London: MOD.

<sup>123</sup> MILLS, C. 2016. Briefing Paper 7353: Replacing the UKs ‘Trident’ Nuclear Deterrent. In: HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY (ed.). London: HMSO.



very much better than it has been in the past, but that public engagement with those opposed to the official position remains as elusive as ever.

### **Public engagement**

*'Even when you've got Vladimir Putin waving nuclear weapons and you've got what's happening in Ukraine, the case is still not properly being made... on the nuclear side even more so. The case goes by default because the assumption is that people will know that it is right. We've got the deterrent and Putin's rattling sabres ... we just assume that we don't have to really argue...'*<sup>124</sup>

When the 2006 White Paper was published, it formed the nucleus which anti-nuclear lobbying has been focused on refuting. Much of the criticism seemed to assume that the White Paper was the output of a political essayist, rather than a carefully worked out, extensively researched and rigorously scrutinised piece of research, by experts. There is a healthy scepticism about government pronouncements, perhaps exacerbated since the Iraq War and the Hutton Inquiry, but the tendency of self-appointed experts to challenge every aspect of the derivation of nuclear policy decisions is disappointing. In 2007, the Guardian cited US atomic physicist Richard Garwin;

*'... one of the architects of the first hydrogen bomb, questioned Tony Blair's claim that work must start soon on replacing the ageing Vanguard-class submarines. He told the defence select committee the submarine's working life could be extended to 45 years or more, putting off the need for a replacement into the late 2030s or beyond.'*<sup>125</sup>

It is not clear why an American physicist had been invited to give expert evidence on submarine life extension to the Defence Select Committee on an area not within his specialisation.

Although they draw on studies with access to all of the MOD's intelligence, horizon scanning, detailed technical information and authenticated costing from industry, every government paper which concludes that Trident is the most cost effective means of provision of the deterrent has been challenged and queried. After the 2011 Initial Gate decision to proceed with the concept phase of the successor programme, the MOD conducted a further Value for Money study to check the

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<sup>124</sup> LORD ROBERTSON Interview with A Corbett 12 November 2014.

<sup>125</sup> GUARDIAN. UK must retain nuclear deterrent, says Browne. 25 January 2007.

predictions and, especially, the technical and financial risk in the programme. Lord Owen subsequently observed;

‘... if CND only read [Nuclear Papers, 2009]<sup>126</sup> and understand the level of debate that was going on, which was far more informed and on the nub of the issue, than anything that was going on inside CND’s own discussions. I think that quite a few people have been very surprised at the level of debate that was going through.’<sup>127</sup>

In the academic and informed debate milieu, Nick Ritchie provides probably the most comprehensive and testing intellectual critique of British deterrence policy. He has challenged the relevance of the British deterrent,<sup>128</sup> the policy of Continuous at Sea Deterrence,<sup>129</sup> the decision making on the Trident replacement,<sup>130</sup> and Britain’s efforts towards a World free of nuclear weapons.<sup>131</sup> Ritchie makes very cogent arguments reflecting personal conviction, mostly drawn from a theoretical framework of social constructivism.<sup>132</sup> This tends to assume that the rule of law in the international environment can provide a viable sole basis for security planning. History would not support this view, having all too often had to learn Machiavelli’s dictum the hard way: ‘The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous.’<sup>133</sup> Or, as Browne put it; ‘Are we prepared to tolerate a world in which countries who care about morality lay down their nuclear weapons, leaving others to threaten the rest of the world or hold it to ransom?’<sup>134</sup> Governments tend to work in a Realist environment, but if the public debate is already being framed in a social constructivist paradigm, it can be difficult to argue that a particular defensive capability is necessary because Britain must be capable of enforcing the rule of law, without appearing to suggest that the UK has no faith in the UN or other international bodies.

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<sup>126</sup> OWEN, D. 2009. Nuclear Papers, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press.

<sup>127</sup> LORD OWEN Interview with A Corbett 16 Apr 2015.

<sup>128</sup> RITCHIE, N. 2009. Deterrence dogma? Challenging the relevance of British nuclear weapons. *International Affairs*, 85, 81-98.

<sup>129</sup> RITCHIE, N. & INGRAM, P. 2010. A Progressive Nuclear Policy: Rethinking Continuous At Sea Deterrence. *RUSI Journal*, 155.

<sup>130</sup> RITCHIE, N. 2007. Trident; The Deal Isnt Done. Serious questions remain unanswered. In: GROUP, B. D. R. (ed.). Bradford: Bradford University

<sup>131</sup> RITCHIE, N. 2012. *A Nuclear Weapons-Free World?: Britain, Trident and the Challenges Ahead*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>132</sup> RITCHIE, N. 2010. Relinquishing nuclear weapons: identities, networks and the British bomb. *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 86, 465-487.

<sup>133</sup> MACHIAVELLI, N. 1519. *The Prince*, London, Penguin.

<sup>134</sup> BROWNE, D. 2007. The United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent in the 21st Century. In: MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (ed.). London: TSO.

Non-engagement with CND has been deliberate on the part of government since engagement with a highly doctrinaire body such as CND is regarded as pointless; it does not lead to real engagement with the debate, it merely raises the profile of the opportunity for CND to make its case.<sup>135</sup> This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the 1941 debate about the 'Committee for the Abolition of Night Bombing' where the Home Secretary responded 'I have no reason to suppose that this misguided propaganda is attracting or will attract any serious attention.'<sup>136</sup>

In this debate, the government is caught between engaging, and giving the otherwise very low key and almost ignored debate the oxygen of publicity and longevity and not engaging, and allowing the argument to spread within limited circles, without the countervailing policy perspective. This was the decision facing Churchill's Cabinet in the 1940s, it was Butler's experience when 'He exposed himself to a crossfire of questions five accomplished controversialists who bitterly oppose the Government's basing of defence policies on the big bombs...'<sup>137</sup> and has been the political experience since. It is clear from the public viewing figures for *Threads* and *'The Day After'* that there was considerable public appetite for the subject, and the evidence above suggests that at present, that appetite is being met by material that is generally partisan or simply misinterpreted. The MOD has decades of experience of not engaging with anti-nuclear campaigners; MOD personnel believe that CND argue from positions of strongly held principle and therefore cannot acknowledge the alternative perspective.<sup>138</sup> (The same argument could of course be made of the MOD, but the policy papers in the public domain do make clear the degree of internal study and debate that precedes them.)

In the 1940s, Spaight was arguably a proxy voice for the official perspective in the strategic bombing debate. Such a voice was missing in the 1960s when Watkins created *The War Game*, but in the early 1980s Michael Quinlan was given extraordinary permission to engage carefully with selected opinion formers; on a non-official basis. There appears to be no government proxy voice to engage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century discourse, although the active participation of retired senior officials and politicians gives a welcome authority and gravitas to aspects of the debate.

'To create a climate in which defence decision-making operates sensibly, sensitively and objectively is in the interests of every

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<sup>135</sup> SENIOR MOD OFFICIAL Interview with A S Corbett 22 April 2016.

<sup>136</sup> HC Debate 27 November 1941. HANSARD vol 376 cc886-7.

<sup>137</sup> TIMES. Nuclear Tests Challenge. 1 April 1958.

<sup>138</sup> SENIOR MOD OFFICIAL Interview with A S Corbett 22 April 2016.

citizen. It will not be achieved by avoiding the difficult moral and humanitarian issues that any defence policy inevitably raises. It can be achieved only by a far deeper public involvement in the discussion of military affairs than exists today.’<sup>139</sup>

Little appears to have changed in the engagement of the public in defence policy generally, and nuclear deterrence policy in particular since the [then] Foreign Secretary Dr Owen, made this point at the height of the Cold War.

### **The press and other media**

‘Democracy cannot flourish without fair and reasoned dialogue’<sup>140</sup> wrote Robin Day, having interviewed every Prime Minister of the previous 35 years. He was considering the demise of the one-on-one political interview as a tool of democratic engagement and oversight:

‘In the sixties and seventies major television interviews, such as those of BBC Panorama, were newsworthy events of much value in the political process. They attracted big headlines, verbatim news reports, fierce editorials, strong political reaction, and lively viewer response.’<sup>141</sup>

He would; ‘... try to ask questions which will reflect what the viewers may wish to know. But I also ask questions which the viewers ought to want asked if they knew a little more about the subject. I try to say ‘what does the ordinary person want to know about this?’<sup>142</sup>

Political leaders may not have relished the set piece interview, but the importance was not lost on them;

‘television has really by-passed the House of Commons in its political interviews of Ministers, not even excepting the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition... Are we really willing to allow the television interview, viewed admittedly by several million people, to assume greater importance than the proceedings of the House of Commons?’<sup>143</sup>

Robin Cook was adamant that the fault of the demise of these interviews lay with the interviewers; ‘...most political choices involve a trade-off between positive and negative consequences, but reducing every political interview to a one-dimensional confrontation suppresses any chance of an honest and balanced discussion of the

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<sup>139</sup> OWEN, D. 1972. *The Politics of Defence*, London, Jonathan Cape Ltd. P235

<sup>140</sup> DAY, R. 1993. ... *But With Respect*, London, Widenfield and Nicolson. p3

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p2

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. p293

<sup>143</sup> Brigadier Sir John Smythe VC, MP, quoted in *ibid.* p34

real dilemma.<sup>144</sup> Day seemed to agree with the effect; 'In recent years the TV interview has become more argumentative than interrogative.'<sup>145</sup> Marr wrote of the role of the interviewer; '... If your story needs to be seen more than once before it can be understood, and many do, then it will have totally failed ... You are distilling information, not packing it in. Get to the point, stick to it, know when it's finished, then end it.'<sup>146</sup> It is this single minded focus that agitated Cook; '...the presumption behind the badgering is that all politicians set out to evade the truth and deceive the public, which feeds cynicism with the political process.'<sup>147</sup>

Nott noted the difficulty of engaging on the complex ethics of nuclear deterrence in an environment where others would contest the issues in more emotive terms: 'To engage the emotions—as the promoters of CND know very well—is an easy task. ... To argue the choices before us so as to engage the intellect is a much harder task.'<sup>148</sup> This remains as pertinent today as it did 35 years ago, or perhaps more so since there are now three generations who have no experience of war.

Discussing how to explain the basic concepts of nuclear deterrence and the ethical issues involved in a deterrence policy based on the conditional willingness to launch nuclear missiles, Lord Owen noted;

'The generation that is the cross-over from the World War have grappled with this issue and it is so frightening; the numbers game in the Cold War, and it isn't just thousands, it was millions. It is almost enough to make you sick to contemplate, and therefore how do you engage on that?'<sup>149</sup>

## Conclusions

This thesis has demonstrated that there has been a sustained reluctance amongst British governments to engage in public dialogue on strategic nuclear deterrence policy. Some of the factors in the decision-making process for that policy have their roots in the arguments about reprisals for air raid attacks during the First World War. That experience and similar factors were significant for decision-making on strategy and public presentation of strategy during the bombing campaign of the Second Word War. Strategic factors such as cost, capability and industrial capacity have had a significant impact on the choice of systems employed by the British strategic

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<sup>144</sup> COOK, R. 2003. *The Point of Departure*, London, Simon and Schuster. P57

<sup>145</sup> DAY, R. 1993. ... *But With Respect*, London, Widenfield and Nicolson. p6

<sup>146</sup> MARR, A. 2004. *My Trade*, London, Pan Macmillan. P267

<sup>147</sup> COOK, R. 2003. *The Point of Departure*, London, Simon and Schuster. P57

<sup>148</sup> HC Debate 03 March 1981 Nuclear Deterrence. HANSARD vol 1000 cc137-224.col 137

<sup>149</sup> LORD OWEN Interview with A Corbett 16 Apr 2015.

nuclear forces, including ultimately driving the decisions to procure Polaris and Trident, but they have had limited impact on the evolution of the uniquely British understanding of nuclear deterrence.

Britain has a different understanding of nuclear deterrence theory and nuclear strategy to any other state, and British theories and motives cannot readily be determined using the same logic as other nuclear weapon states may pursue. Due to decades of reticence in this policy area, within and outside government, there is a need for education in the lexicon of that theory and strategy at all levels in Whitehall and Westminster. This would inform a profound shift in the leadership exercised in the nuclear policy area if the hard decisions required to ensure the maintenance of the strategic nuclear deterrent are not to be derailed by ineptitude or simple ignorance.

Moral factors have had a profound effect on the nature of Britain's nuclear deterrent. Britain has been a reluctant nuclear power always trying to balance its realist understanding of the utility of nuclear weapons with an idealist aspiration to find a way to create the conditions for a world free of them. The two are usually in tension, most evidently during periods where decisions on the future of nuclear weapons systems are required.

Technical factors have affected the decisions taken about the nature and scale of the British nuclear deterrent. The perceived scale of destructive capability necessary to deter the Soviet Union drove the decision to procure systems as capable as Polaris and subsequently Trident, and limited national industrial capacity and cost drove the decision to seek those systems from the USA. A similar balance of technical and moral factors pertains today; since the 2006 White Paper, the British government has been more open than ever before about the technical factors driving system decisions, but as guarded as ever about the moral factors which are taken into account in the decision to remain a nuclear weapon state.

The British government has used different means of dealing with policy development in challenging ethical areas, some of which are considered above. In the case of nuclear weapons policy, government has invariably reverted to reticence and avoidance of the issue in public debate, and that has been the crux of this thesis; why?

In a contemporary, rights-based ethical paradigm, the concept of war as a tool for political objectives is nearly untenable. In the realist paradigm in use by statesmen,

war is justified under certain parameters. The evolution of British ethical thinking after the German air attacks of the First World War and the Allied strategic bombing campaign of the Second World War pushed the boundaries of what could be considered acceptable in a war for national survival, and led subsequently to the evolution of the concept of 'supreme emergency'. This concept excuses, although it does not justify, the killing of non-combatants under certain circumstances. The supreme emergency concept is incompatible with modern ethical models.

The nature of contemporary media is such that complex issues tend to be reduced to simple catchy phrases; soundbites. These cannot convey the range of factors required to make decisions about fundamental moral questions such as human embryology, genetic modification of crops or nuclear deterrence policy. In these ethically challenging areas, the public is uncomfortable deferring to experts, and tend to want to know more for themselves. Modern media are not equipped to provide the necessary environment for rational and considered debate. Nor is it common any longer in any Parliamentary environment, including select committee evidence sessions, although it can be found in specialist environments such as think tanks.

As a result of feeling unable to articulate the complex ethical factors associated with these policy areas in a suitable public environment, governments have tended to avoid occasions where *extempore* intervention might be necessary, and official intervention has tended to be either; by proxy; formulaic or; not present at all.

The current Successor decision process is symptomatic of this lack of engagement. Since the 2006 White Paper however, the Labour government, the 2010-2015 Coalition and, it appears, the 2015 Conservative government, have been addressing this to a certain extent with the formulation of the Cabinet Office Communications Steering Group, and there is a coherent ongoing process of conveying official nuclear deterrence policy through government papers and publications. This is a significant step forward, although it still concentrates on the technical factors.

The backbone of British defence and security policy remains nuclear deterrence. The present public debate about the successor for the Vanguard class is essentially sterile and tends to be in a context set by anti-nuclear lobbyists, with the reactive official view appearing defensive. Technical discussions about cost and capability have become the primary area of decision because the underlying rationale for why

nuclear deterrence is important to the UK is not understood well, if at all; and is certainly not well articulated. There is more risk now than ever before that future decisions will be made purely on cost grounds and the deterrent cancelled almost by accident, or without understanding the strategic ramifications such a decision entails.

To enable nuclear policy decision-making to operate in the more open style of 21st century British government is in the interests of every one of us. This will not be achieved by perpetuating the historic avoidance of difficult ethical issues that it raises. It will be achieved only through better education of 'experts' in deterrence ethics, better communication of those expert views to the public, and better education of our population to be able to assess competing ethical paradigms and claims.



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